

EXERCISE RUNS: DESIGN

Hutches and runs can be portable (moved around the lawn together as required) or permanent, with a hutch within the enclosure. Permanent enclosures are best sited on an easily-cleaned base such as paving slabs - grass will quickly turn to mud!

Portable runs sitting on grass must have a wire-mesh floor to prevent the bunnies from digging out. If the hutch isn't permanently attached to the exercise area, provide a wooden box or covered area for the rabbits to shelter or hide in.

SAFETY FIRST

Each year, many pet rabbits are snatched from gardens by predators - particularly urban foxes. You must protect your rabbits from attack by dogs, cats, foxes, and birds of prey.

Chicken wire provides little protection - use strong weld mesh, with sturdy door fasteners, and check the doors regularly.

Exercise runs need secure lids, to keep the rabbits in and predators out!

If your rabbits are allowed to roam free in the garden, make sure that the garden is escape-proof; that there's a "bolt hole"; and remember to remove or prevent access to poisonous plants.

KEEPING OUTDOOR RABBITS HEALTHY

Outdoor rabbits need regular health-checks. The RWF "Bunny MOT" leaflet explains how to do this at home. Outdoor rabbits are at particular risk from the deadly diseases VHD & myxomatosis - keep vaccinations up to date!

FLYSTRIKE

Did you know that flies can cause a maggot infestation on your rabbits, which can cause serious damage and even death?

Rabbits suffering from obesity, dental disease, diarrhoea, arthritis and skin wounds are at highest risk. Flies are also attracted to rabbits living in poor environmental conditions e.g. dirty hutches - always keep your rabbits' living area clean.

Even rabbits kept in clean conditions may develop soiled hindquarters and attract flies. Once flies lay their eggs, they quickly develop into maggots which will soon cause damage to your rabbit and can often be fatal.



This leaflet is brought to you by the Rabbit Welfare Fund - the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association.

If you love rabbits, please consider supporting the Rabbit Welfare Fund. You can make a donation, or you may like to join the RWA. As well as fund-raising activities, most RWA

members kindly make a small donation to the RWF in addition to their annual RWA membership fee. RWA members receive a fabulous quarterly magazine packed with health, behaviour and care advice to help you to build a wonderful relationship with your bunny - whether she/he lives indoors or out.

To contact the RWA/Rabbit Welfare Fund:
Ring the RWA National Helpline on 0844 324 6090

Write to us at PO Box 603, Horsham,
West Sussex RH13 SWL.

Log onto our websites
<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk>
<http://www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk>

Contact the National Helpline to order bulk supplies of leaflets or send SAE for single copies.



Rabbit Welfare Fund
Write to us at PO Box 603,
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5WL.
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Registered Charity Number 1085689

A HUTCH



IS NOT ENOUGH



As a responsible pet owner, you'll want your bunnies to enjoy a happy, healthy life. Just think - rabbits need space, exercise, companionship and stimulation and you won't go far wrong! Rabbits can live indoors or out - if you've chosen to keep yours outdoors then we hope this leaflet will inspire you to give your rabbits the lives they deserve.

More and more and more people nowadays are keeping their rabbits indoors, if you think this might interest you then read the RWAf leaflet "Hey Look at Me, I'm a Houserabbit".

Rabbits need.....

SPACE and EXERCISE

You should never keep your rabbits in a hutch permanently. They need daily exercise, ideally 8 hours per day in a large run or garden. However, you should still ensure that their hutch is large enough. The minimum recommended size is 6ft x 2ft x 2ft, but always think bigger is better.

Hutches can never be too big, bigger is better for busy buns!

Did you know that rabbits were first kept in hutches by the Victorians when they were kept for meat. They were never intended as long term accommodation.



Rabbits are active animals, they need to run, jump and dig, they can't do this in a hutch. Daily exercise outside of the hutch is vital to allow them to display their natural behaviour. They can develop painful skeletal problems if kept permanently caged.

Accommodation options range from a traditional hutch and run, to a purpose built paradise, and anything in between. Use the pictures on this leaflet to give you ideas, but work within your own space and budget. The only limit is your imagination!

When it comes to exercise, rabbits often enjoy running loose around the garden. This is ideal for them but please remember that they will need supervision as there are risks to the rabbit, and of course to your plants!

When you can't supervise your rabbits, an exercise run is a good option. Exercise runs should be at least 8 feet x 4 feet x 2 feet high - but again - bigger is always better! The run also needs to be secure enough to keep out predators.

COMPANIONSHIP

Rabbits are social animals. They love to snuggle together, groom each other and keep each other warm, so they should be kept at least in pairs. A male/female pair is easiest, but don't forget that both rabbits will need to be neutered, and introductions carefully supervised! The RWAf leaflet "Bunny Buddies" explains how to pair up rabbits successfully.

STIMULATION

Rabbits need things to keep them occupied, such as plastic tunnels; large plant pots; hay-filled litter trays and planters of earth to dig in. Wild rabbits spend several hours foraging for food daily, so use your imagination when feeding your bunny. Scatter food on the floor of the hutch/run rather than feeding in a bowl, and provide constant access to hay. A huge amount of rabbit toys are available in pet shops and online, but even shredding an old cardboard box will give them hours of fun!

RABBIT HUTCHES: DESIGN & LOCATION

Most people still opt for the traditional wooden rabbit hutch. When choosing a hutch make sure it is a large solid construction, and is predator and weather proof. Make sure you check that the door fastenings are strong enough to keep foxes out.



Instead of the traditional rabbit hutch, why not make your rabbit habitat an attractive garden feature? Be imaginative... garden sheds; summerhouses; or wooden Wendy Houses with an aviary/run built on the side (accessed via a cat flap) make ideal homes. Remember to provide adequate additional ventilation - wooden buildings can overheat rapidly in summer.



If you opt for a hutch make sure it has a living area with a strong wire-mesh door and a partitioned sleeping area with a solid door. There are many variations of the basic hutch design. Some have ramps to allow access to a built-in run underneath. The main drawback of this design is that bedding from the living area often falls down the hole when the ramp is lowered.

Hutches must be raised on legs to give protection from damp, and to deter vermin. The roof should be covered with roofing felt; sloped to allow water to run-off; and have an overhang. Rabbits can not tolerate damp, drafts or excess heat so make sure that you site the hutch in a sheltered area, and out of direct sunlight or driving snow and rain. Don't forget to provide extra warmth in the form of extra dry bedding in the colder months.