

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! Remember to include a digging and grazing tray as mentioned elsewhere in this leaflet. Portable runs sitting on grass must have a wire-mesh skirt to prevent the bunnies from digging out. If the hutch isn't permanently attached to the exercise area, provide several wooden boxes or bolt holes for the rabbits to hide and shelter 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, ferrets, polecats, weasels, stoats, mink 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! Hinges and catches are just as important on runs as they are on hutches. 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' where the rabbits can feel safe if anything should frighten them and remember to remove or prevent access to poisonous plants.

KEEPING OUTDOOR RABBITS HEALTHY

Outdoor rabbits need regular health-checks. The RWA's Hop To It booklet explains how to do this at home. Outdoor rabbits are at particular risk from the deadly diseases RVHD & myxomatosis - keep vaccinations up to date!

FLYSTRIKE

Did you know that flies will lay eggs on rabbits leading to a maggot infestation, 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 attack your rabbit and this can often be fatal. So you must thoroughly check your rabbits every day, particularly in the summer months. Check out our Hop to It booklet or website for more information.

Join us!

As a member you will receive:

- Four issues of Rabbiting On a year
- The RWA Members Handbook*
- Hop To It, our comprehensive rabbit care guide*
- Stickers for your car and pet carrier*
- Reduced rates at our annual conference.
- An invaluable Vet Expert Advice

*These items are in the joining pack only



Apply for membership

Complete the form below and return to: **Rabbit Welfare Fund, Enigma House, Culmhead, Taunton, TA3 7DY**. Alternatively, for instant membership by debit or credit card or via PayPal, you can join online at <http://shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/> or you can telephone the RWA's National Helpline on **0844 324 6090**. Calls charged at local rate from landlines. Mobile providers will charge more.

Please use **BLOCK CAPITALS**

Name: _____

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I would like to apply for membership of the Rabbit Welfare Association. I agree to be bound by the rules and constitution of the organisation. I understand that my membership details will be held on computer.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Annual Subscription: Join today and receive a car sticker absolutely free!

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|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult/Junior | £20 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary Practices (this includes 75 Hop To It booklets) | £45 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rescue membership (this includes 75 Hop To It booklets) | £40 |

Or join on line via our shop:

<http://shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/> or you can telephone the RWA's National Helpline on **0844 324 6090**.

Please note:

Cheques should be made payable to the 'Rabbit Welfare Association'

Payment by credit/debit card. Please complete the form below.

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The RWA is a combination of the Rabbit Welfare Association and its charitable arm, the Rabbit Welfare Fund (registered charity number 1085689). Membership is to the RWA.

This leaflet is sponsored by Pippin, a very lucky house rabbit who knows that A Hutch is Not Enough



A hutch is not enough

The RWF Guide to keeping your rabbit outdoors



Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund

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 shelter, exercise, companionship and toys 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.



RABBITS NEED....

SHELTER AND EXERCISE

You should never keep your rabbits in a hutch permanently. They need daily exercise and to be able to choose when they rest or play. Rabbits are 'crepuscular' so most active at dusk and dawn, traditionally times when we would have locked them up for the night, so it is important that their whole area is safe and that they can follow their own body clock. So they should have a permanent living area of 10ft x 6ft x 2ft high as a minimum, where they can rest, forage, dig, rear up tall, run and hide. If you can't do this for them you will need to provide as big a safe exercise area as possible which is always attached to their hutch or shed. Make sure they're secure from predators though. Aim for a minimum of 8ft x 6ft x 2 ft high. Although this might sound big, it's really only 4 hops for most rabbits! Remember to provide a hiding place for each rabbit in the exercise area too. You could join two smaller exercise runs together to create this space, and join the hutch / shed to the run using a 'Runaround' system (see photo)



Did you know that rabbits were first kept in hutches by the Victorian when they were kept for meat? Hutches were never intended as long term accommodation, remember **A Hutch is Not Enough!**

Rabbits are active animals, they need to run, jump, hide 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 they're 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!

If you have indoor rabbits then an area of 10 x 6 can be provided by using puppy panels. Indoor cages are only suitable to hold a litter tray and hay rack, they should never be the sole or main accommodation for any rabbit. They do not offer a 'hiding' place like a traditional hutch, so provide your rabbits with a bolt hole where they can feel safe, by covering the cage with a throw, or using a cardboard box with 2 holes cut out.

Because rabbits should be kept in (neutered) compatible pairs, remember that the space needs to be big enough for two. However, one rabbit needs just as much space as two do to run and play.

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 neutered, compatible pairs. A male/female pair is easiest, but don't forget that both rabbits will need to be neutered, and introductions carefully supervised! There is lots of information in our Hop To It booklet on how to do this, or check out our website. If you want more detailed help with bonding a pair you can contact us at hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk or phone the Helpline

TOYS

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 or use a treat ball, rather than feeding in a bowl, and provide constant access to hay. A huge variety of rabbit toys can be found in pet shops and online, but even shredding a simple 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. As a minimum look for something 6x2x2 ft and

make sure you check that the door fastenings, hinges and wire 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 plenty of 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't tolerate damp, draughts 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. In the colder months don't forget to provide extra warmth in the form of extra dry bedding.