



Animal House
Veterinary surgery

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I WANT A RABBIT

There are lots of things to consider before acquiring a new animal to share your life. Forewarned is forearmed as many pets need lots of attention to live successfully with us, sometimes more work than anticipated. If you have already had a similar pet it is wise to consider how that breed-type may have changed over the years and if your requirements have changed. If you are taking on an animal that you have not had experience of before, it can be a journey into the unknown. Have you already thought what to do with your pet if you visit friends for an overnight stay, for example? We have listed some pointers to help you make your choice about different types of animals and where to find them.

There are many different breed types of rabbit, they live for 7-10 years in the domestic environment. They all need vaccinating against V.H.D. and parasite control, feeding, neutering and bi-annual trips to the vet, especially to check teeth and claws. Kennel costs may apply if you take holidays. It is seen as abandonment to leave your rabbit home alone for more than 48 hours and is a prosecutable offence. We recommend neutering and providing with company, i.e. another rabbit. We estimate the cost of keeping the average rabbit to be **£6,200** during its lifetime.

WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT RABBITS

Rabbits are independent and do not need to be walked or trained. They are successful pets for a lot of people, especially if they have other rabbit company. Cats and dogs can live happily together with a rabbit if properly integrated. If you have mobility problems then you do not actively have to actively exercise a rabbit. Rabbits need to be groomed, but this is minimal in the case of a short-haired rabbit. A long haired rabbit needs regular grooming.

Rabbits can be trained to live free in a house, just like a cat or dog but you can keep them in a hutch so long as they have enough space (recommended as minimum 1 foot per lb. weight of the bunny). They need time for exercise and company out of the hutch. They can be affectionate and funny. They thrive on a simple diet. The best of all is grass which is growing, allowing your rabbit to graze. Most people do not have enough space for this so hay and fresh vegetables make a good alternative. Do not feed freshly mown grass as it causes digestive problems. Do not give lettuce or quantities of cabbage as they cause diarrhoea. Rabbits like to munch on all sorts of leaves, some of which are poisonous so be vigilant about what your rabbit is ingesting. They do not need to be bathed as they self-groom.

Rescues

Rescue centres up and down the country are full of all types of rabbit. Usually where someone has one, can't cope with the demands and gives them up. There are other common reasons for rescuing. Some people have to re-locate and cannot take their pet, or maybe their owner has died. Contact Rabbit and Guinea Pig Rescue or the R.S.P.C.A. They have lots of rabbits needing homes and a long waiting list where more need to come in and find a new home. We do not recommend that you buy a bunny from a pet shop especially as rescues are inundated with rabbits who need a home. Rescues can give you lots of information on the individual character of

each rabbit. If you have small children it is wise to choose a rabbit that is already known to be calm and sociable when handled, not a notorious biter and scratcher.

RABBIT TIPS

Never pick a rabbit up by the ears as it can cause them damage. Pick them up by the body supporting the legs. This makes them feel more secure and less likely to buck and panic. Rabbits can cause you physical damage by bucking with their hind legs which are long and strong. Put them down and do not persist if they try to buck. Rabbits are notorious chewers. If you have your rabbit in the house you should protect cabling and wires from your curious rabbit chewer. They have the potential to cause £1,000s of damage to electrical goods and cause house fires because of their chewing. You can train a rabbit not to chew. Say NO loudly and make a loud noise, removing the rabbit from the scene of the crime. If you repeat this as they attempt an inappropriate chew, they will learn not to do it. House rabbits need a litter box and need to be trained to use it. They can do this easily but will need encouragement. Never leave a rabbit to over winter outside in a hutch, it is not warm enough in this country and they could die of exposure. You must check a rabbit daily for signs of ill health. They do not draw your attention to feeling poorly very obviously so you must examine them carefully. Check them all over for lumps, scratches, dental problems, weepy eyes and fly strike-at the back end. Always err on the side of caution and contact us with any queries. If generally being kept outside they must have a secure space to save them from predators and to stop them from escaping.

If a rabbit is not for you then check out our other information sheets on **I WANT A...**