

Double 'D' Ranch

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Exercise, Exercise
By Debra Olon-West


Rabbits need to be exercised daily like any other animal to maintain good health and a good weight. In the weight aspect, a healthy diet is also recommended with as little processed foods as possible and a balance of greens. However, many overindulgent pet rabbit owners will over feed the rabbit and not encourage enough exercise. Result: a case of Butterball Bunny with jiggles of fat that are a recipe for a heart attack for the poor thing, not to mention a shortened lifespan.

The House Rabbit Society recommends two hours a day for exercise, which I agree with, but how to keep them active? I would suggest any of the following options:

 Play: direct interaction and 'games' that the rabbit introduce are a good start. Ours like to play 'chase' and 'hide & seek'. It is important not to frighten the bunny by appearing too aggressive, so let them set the pace. More on this topic is covered in the article 'The importance of play/interaction with your rabbit' (don't forget the bunny toys).

 Take a walk with the bunny: yes, you heard me, you *can* walk your rabbit on a leash, or rather allow the bunny to walk you. The trick is to find the right leash. I suggest a halter collar as opposed to a regular around the neck collar. DO NOT use a choke chain, since they could get stuck on something and strangle themselves. A halter for small dogs can be found at Wal-Mart inexpensively; simply go by the weight of the rabbit in regards to the proper size. Bunnies love to explore so you will need to use something that will not hurt them if they get tangled in bushes, etc. Also, for a leash you will need a chain since the rabbits have a tendency to chew up the cloth ones (they can get through one very quickly as we found out). Note: Do not leave the rabbit outside by himself since he would become the prey of cats and dogs, etc.

 Outdoor play yard with exercise toys in them. The ideal play yard would be like a chicken coop with a wire top on it to keep predators at bay. Large pieces of pipe to run through and different types of wooden/cardboard boxes to chew on and hide in also work well. It does not have to be fancy, but constructed for safety. Just remember to supervise their activities outside for safety's sake. The same principle can be used in the house if you have plenty of space to do so.

 Indoor toys help as well to keep the weight down. Since rabbits are fixated on food, making the rabbit jump over a hurdle to get to the dish gives them exercise. Other fun things could be placed in the cage such as boxes, platforms, and ramps for the rabbit to run on and play in will stimulate exercise as well.

So get on the bunny tennies (and yours) and have fun with the bunn. You will see his appreciation with the presentation of your happy, healthy friend.