

Double 'D' Ranch

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INTEGRATING YOUR BUNNIES

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Presented here are possible questions that you may have when acquiring your rabbits or adding another one to you household. We do recommend that you have more than one rabbit, since they are herd animals and do better with others of their own kind. You may wish to keep an extra hutch handy if the bonding process takes longer than expected.

- Q. I would like to get two or more rabbits for my household. Can I put them in the same hutch?
- A. It is possible to do so, but you would need a cage large enough for all of the bunnies. The House Rabbit Society recommends one square foot per pound of rabbit, so depending on the size of bunnies you would like to have you have to adjust the amount of space accordingly.
- Q. What is the best combination of bunnies to have in my household?
- A. If you can get littermates, half of your work is done, since they are already integrated. If you are thinking along the lines of which genders to mix, a male and female pair works better than male-male or female-female. If you wish to get a mixed pair of rabbits, you get the buck neutered at least 2 weeks before putting them together (ask your veterinarian for verification) to allow the buck time to heal and to make certain that the pair can not reproduce (he is still viable during that time period).
- Q. How would you integrate two rabbits that have been kept separately before coming to my home?
- A. Here are some useful tips:
-  At least one or both of the rabbits should be fixed, especially a six-month-old buck, since the males are territorial.
 -  You would need to integrate the bunnies slowly before putting them in the same cage and should put their hutches next to each other.
 -  Start with one inside the hutch and one outside for a limited amount of time, such as 10-15 minutes. Monitor their reactions to each other (watch for aggressive behavior) and when they seem calm after several days, go to the next step.
 -  Choose a neutral place to put both bunnies in, such as a bathtub, for a limited amount of time; monitor their reactions. Do this for several days.
 -  Take them for daily car rides together for a limited amount of time in the backseat. They often huddle together for comfort.
 -  Be consistent with this bonding process.
- Q. What do you mean by aggressive behavior?
- A. Rabbits may fight even if separated for a short time. They will bite, scratch, or try to take chunks of fur out of each other. They will also make noise or grunt loudly if they

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feel threatened. We had a pair of rabbits come in who were separated for only a few days; they were an older and younger set of bucks. The younger had just turned six months old and was very aggressive with the older and smaller buck; we had to separate them permanently.

Q. Do rabbits have a 'pecking order'?

A. Yes. Usually in a herd of two or more rabbits, an order of dominance is established and one becomes the 'alpha' bunny. He will expect more attention from the other rabbit(s), such as grooming, but he also is the official protector of the 'herd' as well. Note: Rabbits will display mating behavior to establish dominance, even if they are fixed.

Q. How do you know if a pair of rabbits is bonded?

A. You will rarely see one without the other. They will cuddle, share food, groom, and play with each other.

Q. If one of the pair of bonded bunnies passes away, what do you do?

A. Show the remaining rabbit extra attention, since she will be lonely for a time. Allow her to go through their own grieving process, during which they may show signs of depression such as not eating or not interacting with anyone. Consult your vet if this goes on to the point of the rabbit looking emaciated. Do not get another rabbit until you feel that she is displaying normal behavior and go through the bonding process again. However, there has been some success with other rabbit caretakers if introducing an opposite gender rabbit who has also lost his bonded friend.

Hopefully, these tips will assist you in having happier bunnies in your home.

Double 'D' Ranch

Deb and Dale's home for wayward bunnies

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