

Double 'D' Ranch

716-672-5678

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You can litter train domestic rabbits? I didn't know that!

By Debra Olon-West

I have heard this comment from the majority of people who either do not have a pet rabbit or have one and keep him or her in their cage full time. It is possible to litter train your pet rabbit, but it requires time and patience on your part.

Q. Are rabbits as easily litter trained as cats?

A. In my experience, it really depends on the rabbit. Some are very easily trained; others are a challenge and may fight it.

Q. At what age can you start litter training my bunny?

A. The sooner the better. Any rabbit placed with us is immediately started with litter training, regardless of age. If you are breeding your rabbit, the doe will teach her young to do as she does. I have found that, in general, older rabbits have been easier to train than the younger ones.

Q. How do I start?

Answer-

1. Place an appropriate sized litter box in your rabbit's cage and keep it in there any time the rabbit is.
2. You can put cat litter in the box, but watch for the ones that are scented or clump, since these may not be healthy for your rabbit to use. With the litter that clumps, the rabbit's urine has a tendency to form an almost cement consistency on the bottom of the box that makes it more difficult to clean.
3. Start your rabbit with his/her training outside of the cage a little at a time. I would suggest that you use a room that is sectioned off and has a linoleum floor. You will need a whisk broom and dustpan on hand to place any droppings in the litter box. Rabbits have a tendency of doing their business in the same place, so you will need to know where in the room and place the litter box there when he is out of his cage.
4. As soon as you let your rabbit out of his cage, place him in his box. Allow him to run around for five minutes, and then place him back in the box. Repeat for the next ten minutes at five-minute intervals. After the total time of 15 minutes, put the rabbit back into the cage. For subsequent outings, allow the rabbit to have more time out of the cage, with longer periods between being placed in the litter box, not to exceed 15 minutes. If he urinates outside of the litter box, correct him by telling him 'no' and he goes back into the cage until the next day. Any droppings he has left go back into the litter box for any time he is out of the cage.
5. Encouragement is the key to successfully litter training your rabbit. Any time, he voluntarily goes into his litter box; give him praise and a treat. Some rabbit caretakers will put treats inside the litter box to entice them to use it.
6. As time progresses and you have bunny proofed the rest of your home, you can allow him to roam the house when you feel he is ready.

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Q. Are there times that a usually well-trained rabbit will mess outside his/her litter box?

A. Unfortunately, some rabbits spray, as cats do. Usually it is the bucks (males) who do this, but does (females) may spray as well. The bucks may also leave pungent smelling droppings in the presence of a doe. Usually, this will be quite a few droppings right around the doe's cage. I would suggest separating the couple immediately, since this situation has a tendency to upset the doe. Other times that a buck may spray is because he is establishing his territory around other pets, such as cats and dogs, even if he otherwise gets along with them. In this case, you may wish to keep him separated from the other animals in the household and have an area that is strictly 'his' space.

With a little time and patience, you will be able to successfully train your rabbit and enjoy more time with him or her.

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Deb and Dale's home for wayward bunnies

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