

Double 'D' Ranch

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The importance of play and interaction with your rabbit

By Debra Olon-West

A healthy rabbit is one who is energetic, eats well, and interacts with his/her caretakers. One way to achieve this is through play and spending time with your pet.

Q. How much time should my bunny spend out of his cage?

A. The House Rabbit Society recommends that a rabbit should have at least two hours of recreational time per day outside of the cage/hutch. It is important that the caretaker schedules this time around his/her work schedule if necessary.

Q. Is it all right to handle my bunny?

A. Yes, but never pick him up by the ears or by the legs, as this can cause damage to the rabbit. You can hold him in the football position or like a baby with the rump and back supported against your body. I recommend that when you lift a rabbit, watch out for his feet and wear a long sleeved shirt, as well as to wear working clothing. This will help to protect you from being soiled, scratched, or nipped.

Q. Can I allow my rabbit to run in the house freely?

A. Certain precautions should be taken before you do so, such as 'bunny proofing'. Rabbits can climb and jump, so all breakables should be out of reach. Wires should be tucked under the rugs or encased in plastic tubing to prevent being chewed. If the wires cannot be protected in this manner, you may wish to coat them with Tabasco sauce. We also recommend that the rabbit is litter trained before setting him loose in the house for any extended period of time (see the litter training article). If the carpeted areas are too much of a problem with the rabbit, you may wish to set aside a specific play area/room. We use our kitchen, separated from the rest of the house by baby gates, as our play area for the rabbits.

Q. What if my rabbit likes to chew on the carpet or a blanket?

A. You can spray Apple Bitters (available in pet stores) on areas that you prefer your pet not to go and/or place the litter box on the spot. The Apple Bitters will need to be redone periodically to be effective. You may wish to give your bunny an old blanket for his use only.

Q. Why do rabbits chew so much?

A. A rabbit needs to chew to wear down his teeth as they are in the constant process of growing. Malocclusion can occur if the teeth do not meet properly. We have found that chew sticks and plenty of Timothy Hay help to assuage this chewing urge, at least to a point.

Q. Can you actually play with your rabbit?

A. Bunnies have individual personalities, like other pets. Some prefer to relax outside of their cage, others want to run and explore everything in sight. Some enjoy being cuddled and held, others want to be left alone until he takes up the initiative. Many of our rabbits enjoy playing

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'chase'. She will hop up to you, nip or head butt, then run away, expecting you to come after her. She will stop periodically to make certain that you are after her before taking off again. In general, it may be a good idea to hold and pet your rabbit a little each day, then allow him to instigate other play. This way the rabbit will hopefully become bonded to you.

Q. Are there any specific toys that you can give your rabbit to play with?

A. Basically, anything that is toddler safe and can hold up under constant chewing is fine for your bunny. Baby keys are a great favorite, as well as jingle balls, and thick plastic cups. If the toys make noise, chances are that your rabbit will love it. I have heard of bunnies stealing car keys out of purses and hiding them, but baby keys are a better for him to chew on. One of the mothers enjoyed rolling a large plastic cup with her kits; they would pass it back and forth and well as to try to climb into it! Another favorite is to give your rabbit a child safe stuffed animal (no beans in it). If the bunny is the only one in the household, she may cuddle and play with it. We have also tried letting the bunnies play in cardboard boxes, since they like to hide.

Think of your rabbit as a two year old and you will see the comparisons there. If the bunny is bored, he will be looking for things to get into. If he has toys and interested caretakers to play with, all concerned will be better off for it.

Remember, an active bunny is a happy one.

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