

There are over 60 breeds of rabbit and 500 varieties recognised by the British Rabbit Council. To help you decide on the breed, we suggest that you think about who the rabbit is for and what they will expect from it. For example, long coated breeds such as the Angora, Cashmere Lop or Swiss Fox may look like 'fluffy bunnies' but they need regular grooming.

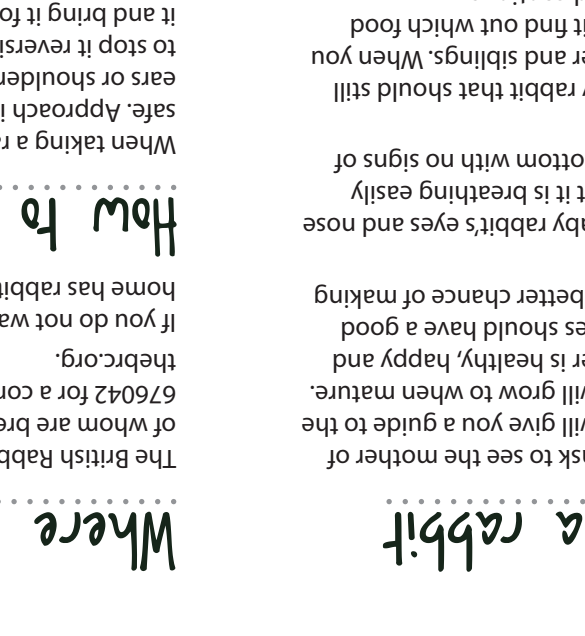
Which breed?

Keeping rabbits is a fabulous hobby – enormously rewarding and enjoyable. There is nothing like friendly twitches of the nose to remind you that rabbits make fantastic pets. As Britain's third favourite pet you won't be alone and there are hundreds of rabbit shows throughout the country where you can see other rabbits, ask questions or even compete yourself.

Getting Started in Rabbits

Buying a rabbit

Where possible, ask to see the mother of the litter as this will give you a guide to the size your rabbit will grow to when mature. Also, if the mother is healthy, happy and friendly, the babies should have a good start and stand a better chance of making a good pet. Check that the baby rabbit's eyes and nose are clean and that it is breathing easily and has a clean bottom with no signs of diarrhoea. Never buy a baby rabbit that should still be with its mother and siblings. When you collect your rabbit find out which food he was fed on and continue this for the first few days to avoid digestive upsets. If you wish to change your rabbit to a different food, do so by gradually mixing the old food with the new over a course of a week.



Is a rabbit for you?

Rabbits are intelligent, friendly and make great companions; however they do require a regular commitment:

- Rabbits can live up to 10 years plus (depending on the size or breed)
- Like all animals, a rabbit will make demands upon your time.
- Rabbits need daily food and fresh water, grooming and company.
- The hutch and pen will need regular cleaning (in all weathers).
- There will be costs associated with equipment and then ongoing feed, bedding and veterinary bills.
- Like us, they can become grumpy or irritable if they are uncomfortable or unhappy.
- You will need someone to look after the rabbit when you go on holiday.



How to handle your rabbit

When taking a rabbit out of the hutch it should always feel safe. Approach it from the front placing one hand around its ears or shoulders and the other supporting its hindquarters – to stop it reversing – and taking most of the weight. Gently lift it and bring it forward against your body with the rump resting on one hand and the other supporting the base of the ears, so it cannot wriggle and will feel secure.

Where to get your rabbit

The British Rabbit Council has thousands of members, many of whom are breeders with healthy rabbits for sale. Call 01636 676042 for a contact name and number or visit our website www.thebrc.org. If you do not want a purebred or baby rabbit your local rescue home has rabbits in need of homes.



Keeping Rabbits – your responsibilities

The Five Freedoms



1. **Freedom from hunger and thirst** by providing fresh water and the right amount of food to keep them fit
2. **Freedom from discomfort** by making sure that rabbits have the right kind of environment including shelter and somewhere comfortable to rest
3. **Freedom from pain, injury and disease** by preventing them from getting ill and by making sure animals are diagnosed and treated rapidly
4. **Freedom to behave normally** by making sure rabbits have enough space and proper facilities.
5. **Freedom from fear and distress** by making sure their conditions and treatment avoid mental suffering

Contact British Rabbit Council for more details,
 The British Rabbit Council, Purefoy House, 7 Kirkgate, Newark, Notts. NG24 1AD
 Phone 01636 676042 Email: info@thebrc.org Web Site: www.thebrc.org

Sharing your love of rabbits

The Home of the Exhibition Rabbit



Showing Rabbits

So you have purchased your first rabbit and you are now ready to enter your first show.



Why show your rabbit?

Both you and your rabbit can have a lot of fun showing. You will get a great social life, friends with the same enthusiasm for rabbits and contact with experts who know the rabbit facts (like behaviour, feeding, moult, breeding) that vets never come across.

And as long as your rabbit is introduced gently to showing it will soon become accustomed. Shows for rabbits are like school for us – a very few dislike shows, most are comfortable and many rabbits love all the attention and excitement.

Rabbit shows

Rabbit showing, or exhibiting as it is known, is very popular – over 1,000 events are held in this country. There are several types of show, from five-star championship shows to events offering four, three, two and one star challenge certificates. The events diary (and there are around one thousand rabbit shows a year) can be found in the BRC's website www.brc.org, or in the rabbit magazine *Fur & Feather*, Elder House, Chattisham. IP8 3QE or www.furandfeather.co.uk

At these shows the judge compares each rabbits against the standard (the BRC standard of perfection for each breed).

This covers every aspect of the rabbit including its health and temperament. Rabbits which conform most closely to the BRC standard will be the winners. All 1-5 star show exhibitors must be members of the British Rabbit Council and registered ring owners.

Everyone can show off their rabbit as there are also fun pet shows (judged on cleanliness, health and temperament) competing for BRC diplomas and rosettes.

Pet shows

Any rabbit, purebred or not, can be shown as a pet, even if it has an identification ring on its leg. However if you show it in the pet classes, your rabbit cannot also go in the BRC classes.

Pets are divided up into classes such as "boy's" and "girl's" (the owner) or "buck" and "doe" (the rabbit). Some shows also have classes for "adult's pet" – this means the pet owner is an adult.

Pet rabbits are judged on health, condition, grooming and temperament. A pet should be friendly, clean and fit, but doesn't have to be a recognised breed or colour.



Rabbit Housing

Although there are very few rules and regulations concerning the keeping of domestic rabbits, it is as well to be aware of any problems that can occur.

Rabbit Diet & Health

Feeding an appropriate diet to a rabbit is probably the single most important factor in maintaining its health.

How many rabbits do you intend to keep?

Many a keeper has thought that perhaps half a dozen hutches will be sufficient; only to find a year later that his chosen (but compact) shed is full to overflowing. It is then time-wasting as well as expensive to build on extensions or start again with a larger shed.

It is possible to run a successful stud with several hutches – if you intend to stick to one breed. But it is more than likely that you will eventually need at least another fifteen or so.

Rough out a scale drawing of your garden and rabbit site. Ideally your housing should be placed so that it will avoid strong sunlight during the afternoon, be protected from rain, sleet or snow and be well ventilated. For hygiene purposes any outdoor hutch, or a rabbitry, should be placed on a concrete base and raised off the floor to prevent damp.

You may decide to place your housing at the bottom of the garden and perhaps screen it with trees. This is fine, if you don't mind going out in all weathers! Or perhaps it may be convenient to have hutches outside the kitchen door. Again, no problem for the good rabbit keeper who keeps their hutches, feeding containers and equipment in clean and tidy order – with predators well away.

Cleaning the hutch

Rabbits should have their bedding changed completely at least once a week. Rabbits like to use one or more corners as their toilet area so you will need to clean out these areas more frequently, perhaps every third day. Clean and wash the food bowls and water bottles regularly. The hutch should be scrubbed thoroughly with an appropriate disinfectant (rabbit friendly ones available from pet shops) once a month whilst the rabbit is either in a spare hutch or the run. When the hutch is dry, replace the bedding. Make sure that you have rinsed everything thoroughly before you replace a rabbit in its hutch.



Feeding your rabbit

Rabbits have a very unusual digestive system that requires a large amount of fibre to keep it functioning well, this also keeps the rabbit's teeth worn down. There are many good quality pellet or muesli mixes available and these should be fed with quality dried hay so that your rabbit can graze and forage.

Water should be supplied in a bowl or bottle refilled every day.



Vaccinations and health care

Find a rabbit-friendly vet and register your pet. All rabbits should have annual vaccinations against myxomatosis and VHD. Rabbits that are overweight or have messy bottoms are susceptible to fly-strike. Your rabbit's nails will have to be trimmed and your vet will do this for you, or nail cutters are available from pet shops or your veterinary surgery. Rabbits can be insured against veterinary treatment costs.

Rabbit Nutrition

by Virginia Richardson MRCVS (Coney Publications)

Colour photographs. 48 pages. 1st edition 1999. Written by a top rabbit and cavy vet, this guide to edible wild plants, cultivated plants and vegetables, poisonous plants and including a chapter on medical conditions with dietary considerations should be part of every rabbit lover's book collection. Especially useful are Fiona Webb's full colour illustrations of wild and cultivated plants. Recommended by vets. £6.00 from F&F

