

Finding the Right Cage for Your Rabbit



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Some rabbits spend many hours each day in a cage, while others are rarely confined to a cage. Regardless of how much time your rabbit spends in his cage, it is important that your choice of housing is one that is right for both you and your pet. There are many different housing arrangements that are appropriate for house rabbits.

IMPORTANT CAGE CHARACTERISTICS

Size: The cage should be large enough to hold a litterbox containers for food, water and hay, toys, yet still allow the rabbit to have enough space to stretch out comfortably. Remember, young rabbits will grow, so the size of the cage should be based on how large the rabbit will be as a full grown adult, not on how large he is at the time you purchase the cage. Consider not only length and width of the cage, but height as well. The rabbit should be able to sit up and stretch without hitting his head on the top of the cage.

Doors: The cage should have a front door that the rabbit can easily hop through, unassisted, when it is unlatched. A front door should open to the side, not to the bottom, because the rabbit may get his foot caught in the cage door when entering or leaving the cage. In addition to a front door, a top door may also be helpful for times when you need to reach in and remove the rabbit or clean the cage. Be sure that all doors latch in both corners and not just in the middle so that your rabbit doesn't try to escape, getting caught in the bars. Also, remember that the door should be large enough for a litterbox to slide through.

Construction: It's very important to inspect any wire or plastic on the cage for sharp, unfinished edges or corners that could hurt your bunny. In addition, to prevent the rabbit from slipping or your rabbit's foot from getting caught, ramps and shelves should be sturdy and made from non-slip material without large exposed holes. Solid-walled cages (including glass or clear plastic) should not be used: they do not allow for enough ventilation or for the rabbit to feel a part of his surroundings.

Special considerations: If you are using a wire bottomed rabbit cage, it is important to cover some

of the bottom with cardboard, wood, newspaper, a towel or synthetic sheepskin so that your rabbit has a solid place to sit. Rabbits do not have pads on the bottom of their feet, so providing a solid resting area is essential for preventing sore hocks. Cages that use wider, plastic slats for flooring provide a more comfortable solid surface than traditional wire cages. **IMPORTANT:** Don't choose a material for a resting surface that your rabbit will snack on (unless it is safe for chewing like cardboard or newspaper). If you find that your rabbit likes to chew, do not leave a towel or synthetic sheepskin in the cage with the bunny when you are not supervising. A bunny that loves to chew may gnaw holes in these objects and possibly develop a blockage - or even get his head stuck in a hole and strangulate himself.

NECESSITIES

Food, water and hay containers: For food and water, choose heavy ceramic crocks that can't be chewed or easily dumped. For water, you can also use a bottle, if your rabbit will drink from one. If do you use a water bottle, be sure to change the water and clean the bottle regularly. Also, note that some rabbits tend to drink more out of a bowl than out of a bottle. Your rabbit's hay container could be anything from the end of the litterbox opposite to where the rabbit eliminates, to a traditional hay hopper or a hay bin (such as a stackable Rubbermaid bin).

Litterbox: Traditional cat litterboxes as well as plastic Rubbermaid-type tubs, and tubs from restaurant supply stores, make excellent litterboxes. Of course, the size of your bunny should dictate the size of the litterbox.

SOME CAGE OPTIONS

Solid Plastic Bottomed Rabbit Cages

Advantages:

- Easy to clean.

Disadvantages:

- Rabbits that are not litter trained or provided with a litterbox will be sitting in urine and feces.

Wire or Plastic Slat-Bottomed Rabbit Cages

Advantages:

- Bunnies that are not litter trained are less likely to sit in urine, which can cause urine burn.

Disadvantages:

- Hay and food are lost through the cage floor.
- Harder to clean because debris tends to get stuck in the bottom.
- Part of the wire floor must be covered because daily exposure to wire floors can cause hock sores.

Metal Dog Kennels

Advantages:

- Easy to clean.
- A solid platform (supported by notched dowels) can be added to medium/large dog kennels for extra space.
- Kennels collapse flat for easy storage.

Disadvantages:

- Stainless steel tray bottoms provide no traction and need to be covered to prevent splay leg. (Note: Splay leg is a condition that causes the rabbit's legs splay out to the side. It is caused by weak or weakened connective tissue.)
- Small breeds/babies may be able to escape or may get their heads caught between the bars and seriously injure themselves or be able to escape. When using these cages for small breeds or babies, it is recommended that you secure hardware cloth or screen around the outside of the cage with cable ties.



CUSTOM BUILT CAGES

You can construct a cage or pen to meet your rabbit's needs. Some rabbits like to chew therefore a cage constructed with a wooden frame could easily be demolished. Never make a cage using chicken wire: a rabbit can chew through this thin wire and cut his mouth.

Neat Idea Cube Cages

The Neat Idea Cubes (NIC) are 14x14 inch square metal grid panels that are used primarily for making shelving units. You can find these panels at some office supplies stores, Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Costco. These panels can be easily pieced together into a custom cage using plastic multi-purpose cable ties. The height, width, and length of the cage, as well as number and position of platforms and openings (e.g., top opening for easy cleaning) can be adjusted to suit your needs.

Advantages:

- Depending upon materials used, NIC cages can be cost-efficient compared to other large rabbit cages.



Disadvantages:

- These cages can be messy, unless you build or buy a guard for around the bottom of the cage.
- These cages do not have floors. Some flooring options include grass mats, cardboard, thin plywood, linoleum, carpet runners or hard plastic floor protectors (from office furniture stores). Do not choose carpet or linoleum (if edges are left exposed) if the rabbit is prone to chewing. Whatever flooring option you choose, it's a good idea to fasten the walls to a sturdy flooring material to make the cage more stable. Office paper binder clips work well for this purpose.

A FINAL NOTE

There are so many different options for housing your rabbit. Regardless of which you choose, it is important to remember that the area should feel like "home" to the rabbit. To help your rabbit settle in, start by setting up the cage in a room where the rabbit can exercise. The rabbit will soon learn that the cage is the place to go for food, water and the litterbox. Soon enough, you will find that your rabbit has accepted the cage as his personal space. However, if the cage is set up poorly, or is too small, your rabbit will see the cage as a place of confinement, rather than as a place to call home.