



Rabbit Advice: Housing

Disclaimer: These notes are only based on my own experience and are not set in stone. They have worked for me and people who have adopted a bunny from Windwhistle Warren, I hope they will help you too.

Note: These notes have been written before the individual species guidelines have been issued under the animal welfare act. Until the minimum sizes have been included in the Act we are using the Rabbit Welfare Association's recommendations for our standards.

Contrary to tradition, rabbits should not be confined to a life of solitary confinement at the bottom of the garden. It is very difficult to purchase the minimum recommended size hutch from a pet shop.

The minimum recommended size of permanent accommodation from the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund is **10ft x 6ft of floor space** with a **3ft height** to allow them to stretch. Please be aware this is the minimum and bigger is always far better. A garden shed or even a child's playhouse can be a cheaper alternative to the traditional hutch and will provide more space. A shed can then be customised, with vinyl flooring, tunnels, boxes, toys and lighting for those dark nights.

Rabbits are most active at dawn and dusk and the best accommodation will have an attached run that the rabbits can access all day and all night. The hutch and run should be strong and secure so that the rabbits cannot escape and nothing can get in. Large easy to use bolts should be provided. A permanent run positioned on paving is both secure and easy to keep clean.

If you have a secure garden which is free of toxic plants then you could let the rabbits have some 'free range' time but they should always be supervised in case a fox comes calling or a bird of prey flies over.

Rabbits suffer in the heat so accommodation should be positioned in a shady area of the garden. The accommodation should also be protected from the wind and rain. A Snugglesafe is a microwaveable heat pad that can be put in the hutch on very cold nights.

Rabbits are very clean animals and will use a litter tray if trained. This makes keeping the hutch clean much easier. Line the tray with newspaper, add a layer of litter and top with some tasty hay. Suitable litters are pulped paper products like Megazorb, Carefresh and some cat litters can also be used provided they are the paper based ones such as Bio-Catoleet or Yesterday's News. Hemp bedding such as Aubiouse, hutch hemp or Hemcore also make suitable litters. Do not use sawdust or wood shavings as these release phenols which cause problems with breathing, skin, eyes and will eventually damage internal organs.

Rabbits can also be house trained and make great indoor pets. As they can be litter trained, a house need not become messy. They can also be very affectionate and spend time on the sofa with you!

It is always good to build some kind of base for the rabbit to retreat to when necessary. One way of doing this is to make a cage with wire mesh squares, where their litter tray, water and food can be placed. You can also try covering sections with blankets or other coverings, so that they have somewhere enclosed that they can feel safe. Although 'House Buns' can become used to being indoors it is still a good idea, where possible, to let them have time outside on grass.