

RABBITS AS PETS

Vaccination – Rabbits should be vaccinated against myxomatosis and VHD (viral haemorrhagic disease). Both these diseases are fatal so it is essential your rabbit is protected. Myxomatosis vaccinations need to be given every 6 months and VHD every 12 months.

Diet – feeding rabbits is simple. They need lots of fibre, easily gained from grass and hay, some leafy greens and little to no pellets or mix. This provides them with all the nutrition they need. It keeps their digestive system moving and reduces the occurrence of dental problems. Most rabbit pellets or mixes are inappropriate to feed as they are very low in fibre and have high levels of sugar and starch. Sugars and starches can lead to an overgrowth of harmful bacteria in the gut. In summary, an ideal diet for rabbits consists of:



- Ad lib good quality hay.
- Access to grazing or fresh picked grass.
- Leafy green vegetables, 1 – 2 handfuls daily (see back of sheet for examples).
- Small amounts of fruit as a treat.
- No more than one egg cup full of good quality pellets daily.

Housing – if kept outdoors in a hutch a minimum of 6x2 foot is required. In addition they must have time out of the cage every day for exercise and grazing. If kept indoors your rabbit must be protected from household dangers such as electrical cords. They should also have their own space, a covered dog crate works well. Indoor rabbits also need time outside for grazing. A minimum of 2 – 3 hrs every day for all rabbits is necessary. An outdoor run is a good way of giving them exercise and grazing time each day. It is essential your rabbit has clean and dry bedding at all times. This normally entails changing bedding daily. If bedding becomes soiled it puts your rabbit at risk of fly strike.



Fly strike – occurs when flies lay eggs on a rabbit which then develop into maggots which burrow into the skin. This is often fatal for rabbits. Predisposing factors for fly strike include: faecal build-up around the bottom, dirty bedding, wounds, long haired rabbits and overweight rabbits. You must turn your rabbit over twice daily and check for faecal staining. Products can be applied to the fur on and around a rabbit's bottom to deter flies. Speak to one of our vets for advice.

Neutering – of both male and female rabbits is strongly recommended. Almost all female rabbits will develop uterine cancer or infections if left entire. Neutering also reduces aggressive and territorial behaviour in both male and female rabbits. We recommend:

- Castrating male rabbits at 4 – 5 months of age.
- Spaying females at 6 months of age.

GRASS & HAY

Grass and hay should be the staples of every rabbit's diet. Square bales of hay that are purchased from equine feed stores are normally of good quality. This is often the most economical way of buying good quality hay.

LEAFY GREENS

These can be feed all the time. Any new item should be introduced gradually in small amounts. If any digestive upset occurs remove the new food.

Broccoli (leaves and top)	Coriander	Kale
Cabbage & cauliflower leaves	Basil	Endive
Spinach	Cucumber	Dock
Bok Choy	Parsley	Chicory
Carrot tops	Radish tops	Apple tree branches
Celery (stalks & tops)	Swiss Chard	Rose branches
Dandelions	Brussels sprouts	Thistles
Water cress	Mint	Green peppers



FRUIT

Fruit can be fed as a treat, maximum of 1 tablespoon/kg body weight/day. This equates to 1 – 2 tablespoons for an average sized rabbit.

Kiwi fruit	Peach
Raspberries	Pineapple
Strawberries	Cherries (must remove stone!)
Blackberries	Blueberries
Apple	Melon
Pear	Mango

FORBIDDEN FOODS

Foods on this list must **NEVER** be fed. They can lead to digestive upset, gastric stasis and death. This list is not comprehensive.

Green beans	Oats	Bread
Dried beans	Cereal	Potato
Corn	Cake	Sweet potato
Peas	Sugar	Onion
Wheat	Chocolate	Bracken
Nuts	Seeds	Cassava
Any grains	Rhubarb leaves & stalks	Bamboo shoots