

# *WHY YOU SHOULD RAISE RABBITS FOR FOOD*



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# WHY SHOULD YOU RAISE RABBITS FOR FOOD?

Rabbits are a great source of good protein, while being low fat. A 3 oz. serving of rabbit meat contains 28 grams of protein, 4 mg of iron, 204 mg of phosphorous, and 292 mg of potassium. Rabbit meat is higher in protein than beef or chicken, and lower in fat.

The younger rabbits, or a “fryers”, weighs between 1.5-3.5 lbs and are approx. 3 months old. This meat is often used like chicken in recipes and is virtually indistinguishable from chicken in most casseroles. The latter being a great way to serve it at family functions without cousin Sally from knowing she ate a bunny.

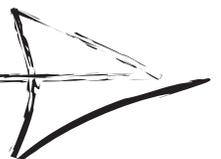
Mature rabbits weigh more than 4lbs, often up to 10 or 11 lbs, and is 8 months old or more. The meat from older rabbits is usually tougher than the fryers and can take longer to cook. It’s sometimes used in recipes in place of beef, though it’s more comparable to duck meat. The meat from older rabbits is often of a stronger in flavor as well. For some the “wilder” taste of mature rabbit meat isn’t desired. For that reason, this meat is better to

put into recipes with other strong flavors such as chili, casseroles, meat pies, and the like.

Rabbits are quick to harvest as well; you can harvest them in as little as 3 months. A Doe rabbit’s gestational period is roughly 32 days, and a 10 lb Doe can produce 320 pounds of meat per year. Rabbits eat very little, and require much less space than almost any other meat animal as well.

Often zoning laws will still allow you to raise rabbits in most backyards even when other meat animals have been banned, such as chicken, goats, and cows. For that reason, you’re not required to buy farmland to raise your own meat.

You should be aware though of “Fluffy Bunny” syndrome and make sure before you start raising rabbits that you’re able to do all that it requires. Many do not have the stomach for killing rabbits, and it can be easy to become attached to the rabbits that you’re raising. Children are the most susceptible to this, and it can become a real issue. While rabbits are for the most part quiet, you’ll



want to be wary of neighbors, as they and PETA can make life difficult for you.

## **American Rabbit Breeds**

There are 47 different rabbit breeds many of which are show rabbits or very small rabbits not worth breeding for meat.

1. American
2. American Chinchilla
3. American Fuzzylop
4. American Sable
5. Belgian Hare
6. Beveren
7. Blanc de Hotot
8. Britannia Petite
9. Californian
10. Champagne d'Argent
11. Checkered Giant
12. Cinnamon
13. Crème d'Argent
14. Dutch
15. Dwarf Hotot
16. English Angora
17. English Lop
18. English Spot
19. Flemish Giant
20. Florida White
21. French Angora
22. French Lop
23. Giant Angora
24. Giant Chinchilla
25. Harlequin
26. Havana
27. Himalayan
28. Holland Lop
29. Jersey Wooly
30. Lilac
31. Mini Lop
32. Mini Rex
33. Mini Satin
34. Netherland Dwarf
35. New Zealand
36. Palomino
37. Polish
38. Rex
39. Rhinelander
40. Satin
41. Satin Angora
42. Silver
43. Silver Fox
44. Silver Marten
45. Standard Chinchilla
46. Tan
47. Thrianta

## **Small or Mini Rabbits (Max weight under 7lbs):**

- American Fuzzy Lop 4lbs.
- Britannia Petite 2.5 lbs.
- Dutch 5.5 lbs.
- Dwarf Hotot 3 lbs.
- Florida White 6 lbs.
- Havana 6.5 lbs.
- Himalayan 4.5 lbs.
- Holland Lop 4 lbs.
- Jersey Wooley 3.5 pounds
- Mini Lop 6.5 lbs.
- Mini Rex 4.5 lbs.
- Mini Satin 4.7 lbs
- Netherland Dwarf 2.5 lbs.
- Polish 3.5 lbs.
- Tan 6 lbs.
- Thrianta 6 lbs.

## **Standard Size Rabbits (Max weight 7-12 lbs):**

- American 12 lbs.
- American Chinchilla 12lbs.
- American Sable 10 lbs.
- Belgian Hare 9.5 lbs.
- Beveren 12 lbs.
- Blanc de Hotot 11lbs.
- Californian 10.5 lbs.
- Champagne d'Argent 10.5 lbs.

- Cinnamon 11 lbs.
- Crème d'Argent 11 lbs.
- English Angora 7.5 lbs.
- English Spot 8 lbs.
- French Angora 10.5 lbs.
- Harlequin 9.5 lbs
- Lilac 8 lbs.
- New Zealand 12 lbs.
- Palomino 11 lbs.
- Rex 10.5 lbs.
- Rhinelander 10 lbs.
- Satin 11 lbs.
- Satin Angora 9.5 lbs.
- Silver 7 lbs.
- Silver Fox 12 lbs.
- Silver Marten 9.5 lbs.
- Standard Chinchilla 7.5 lbs.

## **Giants: (Max weight over 12 lbs.)**

- Checkered Giant (no max listed)
- English Lop (10.5 lbs and up)
- Flemish Giant (no max listed)
- French Lop (no max listed)
- Giant Angora (no max listed)
- Giant Chinchilla (16 lbs.)

## **Choosing Your Breed:**

When choosing a breed to raise, you'll want to take into consideration what type of farming you'll be setting up and how much space you'll need to do it. The larger the animal, the more space you'll need, and some breeds do better in certain climates than others. You'll also want to decide if you'll be housing them indoors or if you're looking to do an outdoor setup.

## **Why buy pedigree only?**

Unless you know the breeder well and you're willing to take the chance on their word, you should really buy only pedigreed rabbits. While Pedigrees won't ensure the health of the animals, they do have documentation of what type of rabbit it is and it's lineage back 3 or sometimes 4 generations. If you're planning on selling the fur, selling offspring, or showing any offspring in the future, you'll want to have a pedigree on your animals.

Pedigrees not only show the breed of the animal, but who sired it, who bred it, and who the Doe was. This goes back 3 generations, so you can trace back your animals to previous breeders if needed. If you live in a small area with only one or two breeders in your area, this pedigree can also help you prevent too much inbreeding. The more inbred the animal the more health problems and deformities you may have in your offspring.

The standard practice for the rabbits

name is for it to start with the rabbitry or breeder's name. This helps trace the lineage and prove the breeding. It doesn't show ownership, but merely who paired the sire and Doe. Offspring of a pairing usually bear the breeder's name on the pedigree unless agreed to otherwise. It can cause a mess if this is changed, and is highly offensive to the breeder who created the rabbit.

Registered rabbits are generally for show only, and demand higher prices. In order to register a rabbit, it first must have a pedigree of 3 generations. American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) will need to check out and grade the rabbit by it's breed. It must meet specific criteria for that breed in order to qualify. This includes ornamental coloring aspects as well as health.

## **Buying From Trustworthy Sellers:**

As with any business, there are those that are high quality and those that aren't. Make sure you start your breeding with the best quality (health) of rabbits as possible. You'll want to check out the breeder's facilities and check the animals over for any signs of illness. You'll want to hold your prospective rabbit, thoroughly examine it for illness or damaged feet, and ask for it's health record.

Rabbits catch each other's illnesses rather quickly, so if there is any signs of illness among the rabbits at that breeder you'll do best to wait or find a different breeder.

Sick rabbits should be removed from other rabbits as soon as possible and either culled or placed far away until it's healed. Most rabbits once sick do not recover.

You'll also want to make sure you trust the seller for other reasons. A forged pedigree, even falsifying a rabbit's age just a few months, can sometimes mean the difference between having a viable rabbit for breeding or simply just buying lunch. So check around your area and ask other farmers for their opinions on where to get the best stock. You may also want to check with the Humane Society or Animal Rescue as they may know of places that breed inhumanely, which may have lower quality or diseased stock. It is also not recommended to purchase stock around Easter as some breeders may have over-taxed the Does or their resources in order to have supply for the demand.

### **The Meat Rabbits:**

Meat rabbits are labeled as such because they have high litter counts and are bred to improve reproductive abilities. Unlike show breeds, the coloring on these is not generally as important as their ability to reproduce at great rates, which is what you'll want for raising meat. Some of these are also show breeds, so do make sure to ask how the rabbit was bred. If it was bred for show, it may have a lower litter count than is normal for its breed.

The New Zealand and Californian breeds

are the most popular breeds raised for meat in the USA.

### **Breeds of Meat Rabbits:**

**New Zealand (New Zealand White):** Despite its name, this is a purely American breed of rabbit. The most popular of this breed is the New Zealand White, but it is also recognized in red and black. Crossbreeding of these colors can result in more diverse coloring. This is one of the larger breeds of rabbit and can weight anywhere from 9-12 lbs. New Zealands are primarily bred for meat, but also for their pelts, show, and for laboratory use. Adults can be more aggressive than other breeds, so routine handling is often recommended to help curb this trait. Does bred for meat can average 8-10 kittens (babies) per litter. Breeding experiments with this breed showed that it improved the kits per litter of other breeds when cross-bred, and often had a higher number of kits per litter within its own breed than other breeds.

**Californian:** This is another American breed of rabbit developed in the early 1900's in Southern California. It is a cross of Himalayan and Chinchilla rabbits with New Zealand Whites. It was bred to produce a great pelt while supplying a good meat. Today this is the second most popular breed for meat-producing in the world; the first being the New Zealand rabbit. The Californian is classified as a "fancy breed". It is most noted for its

big ears and is considered moderate in size averaging 8-10 lbs. Coloration of the rabbit is similar to the Himalayan rabbit. It should have a predominantly white body and dark brown to black fur on the feet, ears, nose, and tail. They have pink eyes. Does bred for meat can average 8-10 kittens per litter.

**Palomino:** This breed is more docile than some of the other meat-breeds, and can make great pets if you're so inclined. It comes in two varieties, Golden and Lynx with fly-back fur. Palomino's can weigh from 8-11 lbs, and usually averages about 9 lbs. Does bred for meat can average 6-10 kits per litter.

**Satin:** Satin rabbits were initially made my mistake. Walter Huey of Indiana was attempting to develop a color of his Havanas when he inbred his animals accidentally creating rabbits with a satin textured fur. When tested, it was discovered that the rabbits carried a recessive gene. Originally shown as Havanas, the breed cause an uproar and was set into it's own breed category.

Satin rabbits have a generally pleasant and calm personality. Adult weight ranges from 8-11 lbs. It is accepted in many colors such as golden red, orange, grey, black, and white. The colored varieties may or may not have a lighter circle of fur around the eye. Litters are comparable to the Palomino, and average around 8 per litter for Does that are bred for meat. These rabbits are bred for their fur and for meat, as well as for pets.

**American Chinchilla:** These used to be called "Heavyweight Chinchilla" and are larger than the standard Chinchilla, but otherwise identical. This breed was brought about by breeding the standard Chinchilla to produce a larger size. They were introduced to the USA in 1919.

The American Chinchilla are bred for meat and fur, but some are shown and can be a hardy pet. Unlike the other breeds, American Chinchillas do not require regular grooming. These are stocky rabbits with a curved back starting at the nape of the neck to their rump. Their weight ranges from 9-12 lbs and like other rabbit breeds the does will weight at the top of scale and males at the bottom of the scale. The average litter size for a doe is 7-10 kittens per litter.

**Blanc de Hotot:** These are very distinct white rabbits with a black or dark circle around a dark eye. They were initially created in France rumored to be a blend of Flemish Giant, Geant Papillion Francais, and White Vienna. These are rather rare to find and are listed as "threatened" but not yet endangered. The standard of perfection with this breed is to have no other color than a band around the eye. The band should be 1/16 to 1/8 inch wide with both eyelids and eyelashes in black. Banding with any break in it is a disqualification when showing the animals, as is too wide of a band. The meat still tastes the same, so you may be able to get members of this breed cheaper if

they are slightly flawed in this manner.

The Blanc de Hotot weighs from 8-11 lbs. They are good breeders and generally have large litters averaging around 9 kittens per litter.

**Champagne d'Argent:** Once known as the French Silver, these are one of the oldest of the French show rabbits, and are great sources of meat as well. Slightly arched backs and shorter rounder ears characterize them. Kittens are born solid black, but start to show variation at around 4 months. Their coloring is a slate blue shade with darker blue underbelly and around the ears and mouth. Some varieties also have a touch of color around the eyes with a trail from the eyes to the mouth.

These are great natured rabbits and are often used as pets. They are small boned rabbits, but range in weight from 8–12 lbs. Litters average 8 kittens.

**Cinnamon:** The Cinnamon rabbit is a relatively new breed created on accident by two kids of a rabbit breeder. It is a combination of Chinchilla, New Zealand, Checkered Giant, and Californian. Created in 1964, it became an established breed in 1972.

The Cinnamon rabbit is most widely recognized by its unique coloring. It is a cinnamon color with dark brown around the ears. Its body has a uniform grey ticking along its back, and its feet and mouth appear to be a darker color than the rest of the body. It also has erect ears. They range in weight from 8-11 pounds,

and have average litters of 9 kittens.

They are well-suited to being pets as well as being raised for their coats and meat. Since these are not the most common meat rabbits, the fur of these may catch a higher price.

**Crème d'Argent:** This rabbit is similar to the Champagne d'Argent in size and nature. The coloring is the main difference as these have creamy fur with orange under-color and dark brown eyes. They weigh between 8–11 lbs and have an average of 5–8 kits per litter.

**Silver Fox:** This breed was first recognized in 1925 under the name “American Heavy-weight Silver”, then later became “American Silver Fox”. It is now shortened to “Silver Fox”, though it is not the same rabbit as “Silver Fox” in other countries. “Silver Fox” in other countries is actually the rabbit breed Silver Marten. This particular breed is not recognized in other countries.

The Silver Fox are known for their docile nature and the kits are born solid black or blue. Kits start to show silvering at 4 weeks but can take up to 4 months for their coloring to complete. Adults weigh from 9–12 lbs. They average 9 kittens per litter.

The breed is valued as much for its fur as it is for its meat producing. The fur is extremely dense and will stand up when stroked in the wrong direction. This is one of the few rabbits that have this trait and is a tell-tale sign of this breed.

**American Sable:** This breed is the result of Chinchilla rabbit cross-breeding. They're nearly identical to Chinchilla rabbits in body structure, but their coats are colored differently. They look eerily like a Siamese cat with head, ears, feet, back and the tail in a dark brown/black while the body is a lighter tan color. The eyes of this breed are usually dark and may have a red hue.

These are one of the smaller rabbits reaching 7–10lbs, and are a social animal. They like the company of other rabbits and their owner, despite spending most of the day sleeping. They average 8–10 kittens per litter.

**Harlequin:** This is an older breed and known mostly for its coloration. It comes in many colors but is most known for its Black Magpie variation, part black and part orange. Ideally, Harlequins should have a half and half color on the head, often looking like a dividing line down the front of the face. The body also has color blocking, which often looks like large stripes across the back.

Recognized color patterns are Black, Blue, Brown, Lilac.

The rabbits are playful, docile and often intelligent. These usually respond to their name, and can be litter box trained. They are often sold as pets, however since the proper color variations are difficult to produce many of this breed are culled until the proper look for sale is achieved.

Harlequin adult rabbits can get up to 6–9 lbs,

and should start breeding at 6 months. The first litter needs to be borne before they reach one year old, to prohibit their pelvic bones from fusing incorrectly. Their litters average between 3–5 kittens, but can be as large as 9.

**Rex:** The Rex rabbit is best known for its plush fur. It was developed in France in 1919 and is recognized by having guard hairs that are as long as its coat. Other breed's guard hairs are longer than their coats. This gives the fur of a Rex rabbit a thicker, more velvety feel, and this rabbit is often raised for its fur alone. The Rex is available in many different colors: Amber, Black, Blue, Broken varieties, Californian, Castor, Chinchilla, Chocolate, Cinnamon, Dalmatian (broken black), Ermine or pure white, Fawn, Harlequin, Havana, Lilac, Lynx, Marten Sable, Marten Seal, Opal, Orange, Otter, Red, Sable, Seal, Satin fur varieties, Siamese Sable, Siamese Seal, Silver Seal, Smoke pearl-Marten, Smoke pearl-Siamese and Tortoiseshell. Though only a few of these colors are recognized for show. It also has straight-standing ears.

The Rex adult rabbit weighs between 7.5 and 10 lbs., and may have 6–8 kittens per litter.

**Silver Marten:** This breed was first established in 1927 for its chocolate and black varieties; sable and blue were added in a few years later. Its most noted by its coloring. The rabbits are almost entirely one solid color with a lighter shade under the chin, underbelly, and inside the ears. They

have fly-back fur and standing ears.

Adults reach 6–9 lbs. Litter sizes average 6–8 kittens. They're supposed to make great pets, but can be more timid than other varieties.

### **Meat Rabbits by size:**

**New Zealand:** Buck 9-11 lbs, Doe 10-12 lbs.

**Silver Fox:** Buck 9-11 lbs., Doe 10-12 lbs.

**American Chinchilla:** Buck 9-11 lbs., Doe 10-12 lbs.

**Palomino:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 9-11 lbs.

**Champagne d'Argent:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 10-12 lbs.

**Satin:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 9-11 lbs.

**Blanc de Hotot:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 9-11 lbs.

**Cinnamon:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 9-11 lbs.

**Crème d'Argent:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 8.5-11 lbs.

**Californian:** Buck 8-10 lbs., Doe 8.5-10 lbs.

**American Sable:** Buck 7-9 lbs., Doe 8-10 lbs.

**Rex:** Buck 7.5-9.5 lbs., Doe 8-10 lbs.

**Harlequin:** Buck 6-9 lbs., 7-9.5 lbs.

**Silver Marten:** Buck 6-8lbs., Doe 7-9lbs.

### **The Giants**

The Giants category is just what it implies.

These are huge rabbits, and not recommended for the first time rabbit breeder or for a rabbit novice. Due to their sheer size, it can be difficult to handle these animals without causing damage to their spines. So breeding these should be left to those with a few year's of experience under their belt or with commercial farm facilities. They eat quite a lot and produce a vast amount of waste compared to smaller varieties. They also require a quite a bit more room due to their size and are prone to sore or damaged hocks if left to stand on cage wire for long periods.

Of the Giants, the Flemish Giant is one of the most popular and is often bred with other rabbits to produce larger varieties and new breeds. The second most popular is likely the French Lop. As with all Giants, these rabbits take longer to mature on average than their smaller counterparts.

**Checkered Giant (no max listed):** The Checkered Giant is considered a show rabbit rather than a meat rabbit. As such, it won't have the muscle mass that meat giants of the same size would have. The Checkered Giant is black and white spotted. Its ears, nose, and around the eyes will be solid black or blue. Body type markings differ between the European and American Checkered Giants, although they are considered the same breed.

Checkered Giants bucks should weigh at least 11 lbs, and mature Does 12 lbs. It is outweighed by the Flemish Giant and Giant

Chinchilla. These are not known to be child-friendly, and are rather active rabbits.

**English Lop (10.5 lbs and up):** This is a fancy breed of rabbit and one of the oldest breeds. It was developed in the 19th century through selective breeding, and is the original Lop breed. It is most noted as a household pet though originally intended as a meat rabbit.

The English Lop averages 11 lbs, and is known for its extra long lop ears. Its ears can average 22 inches which is the largest of any rabbit breed. English Lops are short-haired in solid or broken colors (color/white). They can come in many different colors including: black, fawn, white, golden, and sooty fawn.

**Flemish Giant (no max listed):** This is one of the oldest breeds of domestic rabbit and has been bred since the 16th century, originating in Belgium. The Flemish Giant has seven recognized colors, black, blue, fawn, light gray, sandy, steel gray, and white. They have a semi-arched back with the arch starting at the back of the shoulders and ending at the base of tail. This gives it a “Mandolin” type shape.

It is a very strong and powerful rabbit and is often raised for meat. They can be docile, but frequent handling and interaction is necessary to ensure this personality trait. Like all rabbits, Flemish Giants can become fearful and violent if handled incorrectly. This is much more serious due to its size and power. It is not unusual for this breed to reach 20 lbs.

**French Lop (no max listed):** This breed is a combination of the English Lop and Flemish Giant. It was established in France in the early 1900's. Lops have ears that droop from the head, and the French Lop is no different. It has a wide range of varieties of colors, and can be found in solid or broken coloring.

The French Lop should be bred 9 months of age, and should have its first litter by the time it is one year old. At one year, the pelvic bones fuse together making natural birth extremely difficult for this rabbit; and having a litter prior to this helps shape the pelvic bones to fuse correctly to allow natural birth. At 3 years, Does should be retired from breeding.

Adults have a minimum weight of 10 lbs and are often heavier. They're known for their large litters of 9 or more kittens on average.

**Giant Angora (no max listed):** This breed is bred almost solely for its fur. The rabbits are rather comical as they are a huge ball of fur with a face peeking out. This is the largest of the angora breeds recognized. They are only accepted in pure white with ruby eyes (albino coloring) and are generally docile rabbits.

Giant Angora's require quite a bit of maintenance to keep their fur from matting, and to keep them from dying of fur balls. Each time they try to clean themselves, they swallow a little bit of fur. With fur that grows an inch per month, it can add up quickly. It is recommended to shear these rabbits about every 90–180 days.

It is considered a must for the health of the animal to shear it at minimum every 180 days. Each sheering can produce 12 ounces of wool.

### **Giant Chinchilla (max weight of 16 lbs.):**

Sometimes called the “Million Dollar Rabbit”, this chinchilla was first produced in 1921 by selectively breeding overweight chinchillas with the Flemish Giant and American Blue. It is blue/grey-flecked with a lighter colored under chin and belly.

Initially produced for its fur, it’s also a great meat producer. It grows to a good size rather quickly, reaching 6 pounds at 8 weeks and 9 pounds at 12 weeks. It is also known for having large litters.

### **Feed and Cage Requirements:**

#### **Feeding your Rabbit:**

There are quite a few food choices for rabbits, but commercial pellet feed is the most popular and easiest to manage. The pellets are high in fat and protein. It’s recommended that you feed your rabbit ½ cup of pellets per 5 pounds of body weight every day. Depending on how much you supplement with other foods, you may be able to reduce this to 1/8 cup per 5 pounds. Pregnant rabbits or rabbits under 8 months of age should be fed unlimited amounts of feed.

Selecting a good pellet feed can be a little tricky. Do not be deceived by pellets that look whole fiber or appear to have crunchy bits.

Pellets that contain dried fruit, seeds, nuts, or colored bits can be harmful to a rabbits digestion. Bad choices in food can lead to fecal matter caked onto the rabbits behind, and can be a sign of cecal dysbiosis, in which the bad intestinal bacteria is outnumbers the good bacteria, which can lead to a very sick bunny.

Rabbits also need a fresh supply of water or the rabbits may not eat properly. Use a ceramic (inedible and heavy) bowl to supply the feed and water, or you may use a water bottle attached to the cage. Water bottles for rabbits have a metal tube with rolling ball that settles and stops the water from dripping out, but when moved by the slightest touch releases a little water. With either method, you’ll want to monitor your rabbits to make sure there is a sufficient supply of clean, fresh water and that the bottle is operating properly. Bottles should be cleaned regularly to prevent bacteria buildup and to keep the ball function operating properly.

In addition to pellet feed, your rabbits will need an endless supply of roughage. Place bits of grass hay between the cages for the rabbits to nibble on as needed. You can also supply them with fresh vegetables and fruits, but these should be introduced slowly. Any significant changes in a rabbit’s diet can cause serious effects in their fertility and health. Any changes in diet should be gradual. If you’re getting a rabbit from another breeder, be sure to ask what the rabbit’s diet regimen

is so you can better ease them into your own system. The least traumatic you can make a transition, the better off the rabbit will be.

The rabbit diet should be mostly grass/hay. You'll want to avoid alfalfa hay, as it is high in calories and calcium and can cause health problems if fed too often. They should also have fresh food during the day for added nutrients/vitamins. You can give them about 1 cup of leafy greens per 2-3 pounds of body weight per day. Most leafy greens are acceptable and should be rotated for variety.

Other vegetables can be supplemented in addition, such as broccoli, cauliflower and root vegetables. You can give these other vegetables to rabbits in a dose of 1 tbsp per 2 lbs of body weight per day. Do not give your rabbit vegetables from the onion family (onions, garlic, leeks, asparagus, chives) as these can cause problems in their blood.

With adding vegetables, watch your rabbit for any signs of distress or diarrhea.

Introduce new foods slowly. If your rabbit shows signs of diarrhea, discontinue that vegetable and try something else.

**Acceptable leafy greens:** (1 cup per 2 lbs.)

- Arugula
- Carrot tops
- Cucumber leaves
- Endive
- Escarole
  - Frisee Lettuce

- Kale
- Mache
- Red or Green Lettuce
- Romaine Lettuce
- Turnip Greens
- Dandelion Greens
- Mint
- Basil
- Watercress
- Wheatgrass
- Chicory
- Raspberry leaves
- Cilantro
- Radicchio
- Bok Choy
- Fennel (entire plant)
- Borage leaves
- Dill leaves
- Yu Choy

**Non-leafy vegetables:** (not more than 15% of their diet. 1 Tbsp per 2 lbs)

- Edible flowers (roses, nasturtiums, pansies, hibiscus)
- Bell pepper
- Broccoli
- Broccolini
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Celery
- Chinese pea pods (without large peas)

- Mushrooms (human edible varieties)
- Summer or Zucchini squash

**Fruits:** (not more than 10% of the diet. 1 tsp per 2 lbs.)

- Apple
- Apricot
- Banana (remove peel—no more than 2 slices 1/8 in. thick per day for a 5 lb. rabbit)
- Berries (cooked or uncooked)
- Cherry
- Currants
- Papaya
- Pear
- Peach
- Pineapple (remove skin)
- Plum
- Kiwi
- Mango
- Melons (peel and seeds are fine)
- Nectarine
- Star Fruit

## Cage and Environment:

Unfortunately, there isn't one style of cage to suit every need. The following are a few guidelines you'll want to keep in mind when making your rabbit shelter.

- *Comfortable*—It should be comfortable for the rabbits. They'll be spending a lot of time in it.

- *Confinement*—It should confine the rabbits to keep them from escaping.
- *Predators*—It needs to protect the rabbits from predators.
- *Weather*—The housing should protect the rabbits from bad weather. Rain, shine, hail, sleet, snow.
- *Access*—You'll need to be able to comfortably access the rabbit in the cage.
- *Cleaning*—The cage should be as self-cleaning as possible and easy to clean.
- *Cost*—It should be reasonable priced and easy to maintain.
- *Durability*—It should be able to withstand a few years of wear and tear.

To allow for the comfort of the rabbits, the size of cage you need is going to vary depending on the size of rabbit, and so is the structure of it. Most rabbits will survive in a sheltered outdoor situation in moderate climates, but do not do well with getting wet. If it gets too hot or too cold, rabbits can freeze or overheat rather easily. As such, its recommended that rabbits have "houses" of their own or are raised inside a home or shelter.

Most ready-made cages will work fine for standard breeds, but the larger breeds will need more support. The Giants will require a wood or solid-bottomed cage or their feet will become injured due to their weight on the wire mesh. Giants also require ap-

proximately 5 sq ft of “run” space. It’s recommended that you allow  $\frac{3}{4}$  sq. ft. of space per pound of mature body weight. So it’s best to pick your breed before you buy your cages.

Cages will also need to have built in waste disposal and regular cleaning to ensure that the rabbits remain healthy. For standard breeds, a wire mesh bottom is used and waste falls down into a pit where it can be scooped out as needed. The giant breeds will require more hands-on cage cleaning, as most of their cage will need to be solid footing.

The pit below the cages should be made with wood chips or dirt to help soak up the urine. Rabbit urine is high in urea which mixes with moisture to form ammonia and can become unbearable rather quickly. Having some kind of absorbent material below the cages helps to alleviate this issue. You’ll also want to have a good ventilation system.

The cages should have the option of direct sunlight during part of the day. Sunlight is good for the animals and is a natural germ killer. However, your rabbits shouldn’t be forced to endure long periods of direct sun as they may overheat or suffer sunburn. So make sure there is a spot of shade in their cages as well.

An optimal environment for rabbits is about 55 degrees F as high temperatures will reduce food intake and growth. Too low of temperatures will result in higher feed costs, as it’ll take more dietary energy for the

rabbits to keep warm. Humidity should be about 35-50% as this will help keep the floors and manure dry. Lower humidity can cause the rabbits to have respiratory issues, and high humidity may increase the ammonia levels.

## **Predators and Diseases:**

Most literature will warn you about having cats or dogs around your rabbits. This is generally not an issue if the dog or cat is well-fed and well-trained. Certain breeds may be more hazardous than others, and it’s best that these pets be introduced early to the rabbits and taught proper behaviors. Once they understand that the rabbits are not foreign but part of the “family”, most pets will accept it. Cats are a bit harder to train in this, so problematic cats may need to be removed from the home. Certain hunter breeds of dogs may also be problematic. However, most working, shepherding dogs adjust fine to the new additions and have been known to herd the rabbits if they escape.

Other predators such as foreign dogs, cats, rat, raccoons, or coyotes can be problematic depending on where you live. Even if you live in a town, you should plan for a possible rat/raccoon problem and for stray cats/dogs. Durable welded mesh in 1/2 “x 1” is the best choice for this as it is strong and won’t break easily, and has small enough holes for the rabbits not to fall through. It is also spaced

wide enough apart to allow feces to fall through unencumbered.

Be sure your cages are sturdy and high enough to prevent these animals from breaking in. A guard dog and possibly an extra fence may help with the issue as well.

Sadly, there aren't a whole lot of cures for rabbit diseases, and since rabbits tend to spread their germs rather easily, you should removed any sick rabbit from the area where your other rabbits are. If you want to try to cure them, you may, but it is advised instead to kill them.

Different experts disagree on how to go from there though. Some say that the carcass should be immediately buried or burned to prevent the spread of the disease. Other's say that in most cases it's fine to eat the animal as rabbit to human disease transmission is rare.

## Here are a few diseases to watch out for:

**Snuffles**—Sneezing or long sessions of sneezing. Thick white snot in your rabbits nose? – This is what is called “the Snuffles” or *pasteurella multocida*. It is incurable and very contagious. Do not breed this animal. It should be culled immediately.

**Diarrhea:** Watery or mucus-covered stools. Some can be fatal in 12-48 hours.

- *Enterotoxemia*—sudden acute diarrhea often In 4–8 week old rabbits resulting in death within

12–24 hours.

- *Tyzzer's Disease*—Just like *Enterotoxemia*, but caused by a different bacteria.
- *Coccidiosis*—This disease attacks the liver causing severe diarrhea.
- *Mucoid Enteritis*—caused by bowel blockage.
- *Epizootic Rabbit Enteropathy*—Highly contagious diarrhea for rabbits.
- “Mild” *diarrhea*—if you are alert, it should stay mild.

**Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease**—RHD is a viral disease that can wipe out your entire herd in a matter of days. It is most noted by these three types:

- Sudden and violet death, and then more dead rabbits. It is exceedingly contagious.
- Rabbit goes off its feed and shows lethargy and trouble breathing. Body temp soars to 105–106 degrees, then cools off just as the rabbit dies.
- Bloody nasal discharge, tightness and arching of the back, noisy respiration as the rabbit struggles to breathe. With this variety, the rabbit may be dead in a matter of hours. In some younger rabbits, it may recover and show immunity. These survivors tend instead to be dormant carriers of the disease, spreading it throughout the herd in feces and urine for at least a month maybe longer.

**Myxomatosis** – nasty virus carried by wild rabbits and transferred by mosquitos. It is fatal. It's most common in Europe, but is also present in California and Oregon. It comes in two forms:

- *Rapid death* – you won't see it coming. Just poof! Dead rabbit.
- *Delayed death* – slight redness of the eyelids, loss of appetite, elevated temperatures. It'll soon be a dead rabbit, and should be culled from the herd.

Whenever a rabbit goes off its feed or appears abnormal, AND if the rectal temperature is elevated above 103.5 degrees F, kill the rabbit and bury the carcass. In many cases, this is the only way to protect the rest of the herd.

## **Reproduction and the Young:**

Most Doe rabbits will be ready to breed at 8 months. Smaller varieties may be ready a month earlier and larger varieties may be a month later. It is essential if you're going to breed a Doe that she bear a litter before she is one year old. This ensures that her pelvic bones do not set too narrow for birth. Bucks, or male rabbits, tend to need more time to mature before breeding. Often, this is just a couple more months, but for some giant breeds, it can be over a year. It's best to ask the breeder who supplied your rabbit for the proper breeding timeline.

Rabbits do not ovulate on a regular cycle. The mating of a rabbit will cause the Doe to produce eggs necessary for fertilization.

Although she has no real heat cycle, she will only accept a Buck in about 12 out of every 14 days. When she is ready to breed her vent area will be a dark pink, red, or purple.

Always place a female into a male's cage. Males placed in new surroundings tend to get distracted with investigating the new surroundings that they forget about the Doe. Once she's in the cage, observe until mating is completed. It is not uncommon for errors in mating to occur. If the Doe refuses the buck, try it again in a few days.

To tell if she is pregnant, you should palpitate her belly in a few weeks. She may already show signs of building a nest, and a nesting box should be placed in her cage so she can prepare. Does have two uterine sacs and it's possible to have a Doe pregnant with two litters. This is not recommended as it can be problematic for the Doe, and the kits when born usually have health problems if born alive. For that reason, you shouldn't breed a Doe unless you're certain she is not pregnant.

Pregnancies for Does last roughly 30 days. Smaller breeds may be a day or two less and larger breeds may be a day or two longer. You'll want to be prepared for this occasion. Most Does won't be nice and have their litters in their nesting boxes. You'll often have to move the kittens inside the nesting box for their own safety as the wire mesh on the bottom of the cages is often dirty and the

holes too big for the small offspring. When touching the kittens, make sure you also touch the Doe and, if possible, rub your finger on her nose to pass your smell onto her. This will help prevent her from rejecting her kittens.

You should try weaning the kittens from the Doe at around 4 weeks. First removing the largest kitten, then the next and so on. If a kitten doesn't seem to be doing well on it's own, it can be placed back with the mother for a while longer. By 5 weeks, all kittens should be fully weaned.

### **Butchering and Preparation:**

This is where most rabbit breeding ideas come to die. Even some of the most well motivated have trouble with this last step, butchering. Killing rabbits can be tricky and if done wrong you, and possibly your neighbors, won't quickly forget it. Rabbits, if given the proper reason, (such as a near-death experience), will scream. Rabbit screams are akin to the lungs of the loudest baby you've ever heard, only high pitched and sound like a child screaming bloody murder. With close neighborhoods, it is not uncommon for neighbors to come see what is going on.

As such, killing a rabbit is an all or nothing job. If you chicken out half way through, you'll pay for it with a loud scream for all the world to hear. Some butchers use a small pellet gun to the back of the head, others break the neck; and others chop the head

off in one fell swoop. You'll need to figure out which method you're most comfortable with. If you're selling the fur, you'll want to make the butchering process as bloodless as possible. Once the rabbit is dead, simply hang it, slit the neck, and let it bleed out.

To remove the fur, simply make an incision at the back of the hind legs, and place a finger inside to loosen the skin from the body. Keep pulling on the skin until you remove it all the way up to the head, then chop off the head. Once the skin is removed, make a light cut to the stomach and between the legs. Remove the innards. You may save the heart and liver if you desire.

Rinse the carcass thoroughly to make sure no contaminants got on the meat, and cook or store as desired.

The meat may be stored as you would whole chicken, or you can cut it up into pieces. You can also debone the meat and store it that way.

Cutting up the rabbit into pieces is rather simple. The entire back legs are one piece each and can be cut from the body where they attach. These make great "drumsticks". The arms of the rabbit can be removed making "wings". The chest cavity can be cut under the ribs separating the rump from the chest, and if desired the chest can be split down the center to make two "breast" pieces.

Enjoy!

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