



FREE GUIDE

Rabbit care basics

Frolicy's first guide beyond dogs and cats

Introduction

Rabbits are the third most common companion pet, and one of the most misunderstood — much of the standard advice that circulates (small hutch, mostly pellets, living alone) runs against what rabbit-welfare research actually shows. This guide covers what the RSPCA, PDSA, and House Rabbit Society's research actually supports, most of which differs meaningfully from what a lot of starter kits and pet-store advice suggest.

Rabbits need companionship as much as they need food

Rabbits are highly social and, per RSPCA data, value the company of another rabbit as highly as food. Despite this, an estimated 48% of pet rabbits are kept alone or only with another species — and rabbits kept without rabbit company can become bored, frustrated, destructive, and anxious. A bonded pair (typically a neutered male and spayed female, introduced carefully) is genuinely one of the highest-impact changes you can make for a rabbit's wellbeing. Rabbits should never be housed with a different species like a guinea pig — they can't communicate with each other and have different dietary and social needs.

The diet ratio that actually matters

Rabbit-welfare organizations converge on roughly the same ratio: about 80% unlimited grass hay, a smaller portion of fresh leafy greens and vegetables, and 5% or less of pellets and treats combined. Hay isn't a supplement to a pellet-based diet — it's the actual foundation, needed constantly for digestive and dental health (a rabbit's teeth grow continuously, and chewing hay wears them down naturally). Pellets in large amounts can actually cause a rabbit to eat less hay, which is the opposite of what's needed.

- Unlimited fresh grass hay — always available, the actual foundation of the diet
- A measured portion of fresh leafy greens daily
- A small, limited amount of pellets — not the main event
- Fresh water always available
- New foods introduced slowly, one at a time, watching for soft stool

Housing needs more room than most starter setups provide

Per the PDSA, rabbits need enough space to take several hops, stretch out fully, and stand up on their back legs without their ears touching the top of the enclosure — the commonly cited bare minimum for housing two rabbits is roughly 10 feet by 6 feet by 3 feet, well beyond what most pet-store hutches offer on their own. A hutch plus attached exercise run, or safe supervised free-roam time daily, is what actually meets this need in practice.

Spaying and neutering matters more than owners expect

Multiple studies converge on a striking number: unspayed female rabbits face somewhere between 60% and 80%+ risk of developing uterine cancer by a few years of age, depending on the study and age range. Spaying essentially removes this risk entirely, and neutering males reduces territorial aggression and makes bonding with another rabbit far more successful. This is a bigger deal for rabbits than the equivalent decision typically is for dogs or cats.

The rabbit-specific emergency worth knowing: GI stasis

A rabbit that stops eating or producing droppings for 12+ hours is having a genuine emergency, not a picky moment — their digestive system depends on constant movement, and gut stasis can become life-threatening quickly. Sudden diet changes or a low-fiber, high-pellet diet are common triggers. This is a same-day vet call, not a wait-and-see situation.

Litter training works with instinct, not against it

Rabbits naturally tend to pick one or a few spots to go, which makes litter training realistic — start with a box in the corner they already favor, use hay in and around the box (rabbits often eat while they go), and expand from there rather than trying to confine the behavior to a spot of your choosing first.

Rabbit care checklist

- ☐ A bonded rabbit companion in place, or a real plan for one — not permanent solo housing
- ☐ Diet built around unlimited hay first, measured greens, and limited pellets
- ☐ Housing (hutch + run, or free-roam time) that allows full stretching and several hops
- ☐ Spay/neuter scheduled or completed
- ☐ Aware that 12+ hours without eating or pooping is a same-day vet emergency
- ☐ Litter box placed where the rabbit already tends to go, with hay nearby

Summary

Most rabbit-care mistakes come from outdated or pet-store-driven advice, not carelessness — the research consistently points to more space, more hay, real rabbit companionship, and spay/neuter as the highest-impact changes an owner can make.

This guide is for general education only and is not a substitute for advice from a certified trainer, veterinarian, or veterinary behaviorist. If you're seeing signs of distress, aggression, or a sudden change in behavior, please consult a professional who can assess your pet directly.