

# Bonding With Your Rabbit & Training Tips

## **Rabbits are not like cats and dogs:**

- Rabbits are a 'prey' animal and are frightened of everything, unlike cats and dogs who are 'predatory' animals so training is completely different
- Discipline is out of the question

## **Start before you bring your new bunny home:**

- This can be a stressful time for your rabbit with the travelling and separation from mum and the litter
- Have your hutch ready in advance, find out if your rabbit is used to drinking water from a bottle or bowl, or both
- When you collect your rabbit you should be given a small amount of food (or told exactly what they have been fed) as sudden changes in diet can be harmful for a rabbit
- Leave your rabbit alone in the cage or hutch for at least an hour to settle in and increase handling gradually

## **Basics for children and beginners:**

- Never chase your bunny
- Do not scream, make loud noises or stamp your feet around bunny as this is very frightening
- Sit down when learning to handle bunny
- Encourage your bunny to come to you – call its name and make friendly noises or tap the food dish
- Let bunny smell your hand and then stroke its head before picking up
- Never pick up by the ears or scruff of the neck
- Your new bunny will need lots of love and attention every day

## **Handling your rabbit:**

- Rabbits really don't like to be picked up, they like their feet on the ground at all times!
- You can compensate for this by holding your rabbit confidently and firmly, with its feet against you

- If your rabbit doesn't feel safe and secure it will struggle to be free
- Pick up with both hands, one under its bottom and one under the body, hold firmly but not too tightly
- It's a good idea not to wear clothing made of shiny/slippery fabric like nylon, they will scramble to get a grip
- A cupped hand over the head can calm your rabbit and stop it from jumping from your arms or struggling if frightened
- Try not to let your rabbit look up over your shoulder, it's very hard to stop them going up and over!
- When putting your rabbit back in the hutch try to put him in backwards (bottom first and facing you), if you put him in forwards he will nearly always try to jump from your hands and his back feet can scratch you, putting him in backwards gives him nowhere to jump to

### **Rabbit learning behaviour:**

- Anything unfamiliar is frightening and threatening for a rabbit so introduce yourself and everything else in small quantities and often, give them time and be patient
- They don't learn to learn like a puppy does, everything has to be learnt individually
- They learn from routine and past experiences and remember them – so make their memories all good ones
- It's very hard to get a rabbit to forget a bad experience

### **Getting your rabbit to come to you:**

- Keep exercise areas small and increase it when you know your bunny will come to you
- No rabbit likes to be picked up or to go back in their hutch and if they think that is what is going to happen they won't come!
- When they do come to you start by giving them a treat – or just say some nice familiar words and their name – always tell them they are a "good boy/girl" and try to use the same familiar words
- Then progress to a pat or scratch on the head but still don't pick them up
- Then when you do pick them up make it for just a few seconds, tell them they are good and put them straight back down exactly where they were
- All of the above needs to be repeated over and over and they will remember all these good times – not the one where you actually do put them in their hutch!

### **Training treats:**

- Good treats for training are things that you can have in the pantry all the time and not run out of! Such as raisins, sultanas, dried corn, peanuts (unsalted and half a peanut is enough) or commercial bunny treats like Nibble O's. Pieces of carrot, herbs and grapes are good too but you must always have them available when training
- Because rabbits learn by association try to use the one treat for one thing only, if they usually get a sultana when they go into bed and you give them a piece of carrot instead they will be looking for their sultana and will think they haven't been rewarded

### **Your rabbit and their cage or hutch (their home):**

- Equally a rabbit may not come to you and they will run and hide in the corner of their cage or hutch
- Make sure you don't invade their territory too much, this is where they feel safe so don't undo that
- A lot of timber rabbit hutches have a big flat roof that lifts up which is great for access when cleaning, but using this on a daily basis can be very invasive for your rabbit. Suddenly their safe, warm and dark hutch is open to the sky, a shadow looms over and big hands reach in from above – imagine how scary that would be if it was you in your house and your roof!
- If it's at all possible use a door at the front of the hutch and approach your rabbit at their level, believe me they will be much happier to see you
- When you clean them out try to put them elsewhere in an exercise pen, don't let them be there to witness the disruption and invasion of their home ground

### **Last of all:**

If your rabbit bites, try to work out what made him bite, there must be a reason and rarely it's because they are just being nasty – was he frightened or feeling threatened or taken by surprise or being squeezed?



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