

Introducing & Bonding Rabbits

I can't stress enough that there are always exceptions to the rule and introducing rabbits is a prime example!

Some will get along instantly without a problem and with no precautions and others will never get along no matter what you do.

Generally speaking rabbits like each other's company but they are territorial and it's not natural for adult rabbits to live together in a hutch.

If you know you want more than one rabbit to live together then try to purchase two females from the same litter, or purchase a pair of very similar ages, and bring them home at the same time and put them in their hutch together, not one before the other.

If you are collecting two rabbits from different places put them together in the same cage/box for the journey home. There's nothing as scary for a bunny as being taken away from mum, put in a box and then in a car, so they will be more likely to snuggle up together for comfort. But still take two boxes just in case!

Combinations:

If you decide to have two rabbits here are the best combinations:

- a male and female are the best combination - the male would have to be de-sexed and they will need to be kept separately from 12 weeks of age until 2 weeks after he is desexed
- two females is the next best option – one may need to be de-sexed if it starts to dominate the other
- two males won't get along
- if you can't buy two rabbits at the same time it is best to get the male first and introduce a baby female 2 weeks after he is de-sexed
- a reputable breeder should not sell a male and a female from the same litter together for a pet home
- these are the minimum requirements for de-sexing, it's still better to de-sex all pet rabbits

Think about smells:

- familiar smells make a rabbit feel safe – strange smells don't!
- try to make sure any unfamiliar smells are disguised
- start by giving them both a big cuddle so that they smell of you
- give them lots of parsley or mint to eat – crush the herbs in your hand and rub it on their noses or even their bottoms

- an extreme measure would be to cuddle one rabbit and without either of them realising get someone else to rub the other rabbit near its bum (make sure it's a clean bum!) then they will smell the same
- put their hutches/cages close to each other so that they can see and smell each other all the time

The first introduction:

- supervise them at all times
- if need be you could start with separate pens but only a few inches away from each other and gradually move them closer together
- always have the first introduction on neutral territory with lots of tempting food, toys and places to hide but make sure you can easily catch them if you need to
- put them together just for short periods of time at first, 10 minutes can be enough, then gradually increase the frequency and length of time spent together
- this will need to be repeated lots of times

A reminder on rabbit learning behaviour:

- rabbits 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
- introduction should be little and often and the rabbits will "learn" that it's a good thing for them to be together, they will remember that they didn't have a fight last time
- just try to avoid a fight because it's very difficult to get them to forget that once it's happened!



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