



Preparing for your new rabbit

Getting a new pet is always an exciting time, but it is important to make sure that you're well prepared for their arrival. It can be surprising just how much equipment is needed for a **pet rabbit**, but we hope the list below helps you ensure that you are 100% ready for when you bring your new bunny home.

Hutch

Whether you are going to keep your rabbits indoors or outside you will need to buy a suitable hutch. It will need to be high enough that your rabbits are able to stand up on their back legs when they are fully grown, and long enough that they can take at least three or four hops in any direction. That being said, the larger the hutch the better, as rabbits need to be able to exercise and stretch.

If you are going to be keeping your rabbits **outside** then the hutch will need to have separate areas for sleeping, eating and going to the toilet. The hutch should be raised off of the ground so that they stay dry.

The hutch must have a shaded area and make sure that it is of sturdy construction and treated with an animal safe preservative. The roof should be sloped to make sure that rain runs off of it and covered in roofing felt to ensure that the roof is waterproof.

Many outdoor hutches also have a built-in run underneath the hutch to allow the rabbits to exercise, which will help save space in your garden, although your rabbits will still need to be able to run loose to exercise properly.

It is important to make sure that you position the hutch somewhere either in the shade or in a position that only receives direct sunlight early in the morning so that your rabbits do not become too hot and over-heated.

If you are going to keep your rabbits **inside** then an indoor hutch will be more suitable. These usually have a plastic base and a detachable wire top. Again, you will need to allow different areas for your rabbits to eat, sleep and go to the toilet. It's a good idea if the sides are relatively high to prevent your rabbits from kicking their bedding out of the hutch.

It's important to make sure that you do not put the hutch in direct sunlight or anywhere that is likely to become too warm, for example in a conservatory or next to the radiator, as your rabbits could possibly develop heat stroke.

Outdoor run

Even if you decide to keep your rabbits inside, they will need to have access to an outdoor run to allow them to fully exercise. An outdoor run should be as large as possible and must be well made and sturdy so ensure that your rabbits are not able to escape from it. Likewise, it needs to be safe from predators like foxes. It is important that part of the run is shaded to allow your rabbits to get out of the sun should they wish to.

Cover

If you are going to keep your rabbits outside then you will need to be prepared for bad weather. Clear plastic can be fitted to the front of the hutch to help insulate it and prevent rain from blowing into the front of it. Alternatively, you may need to consider moving the hutch indoors or into a garage or shed in bad weather. Never keep rabbits (or other small animals) in a garage that is being used due to the car fumes.

Water bottles and bowls

You will need to have at least one water bottle or bowl for your rabbits to drink from. Offering both a drinker bottle that can't be knocked over and is easily kept clean, together with a drinking bowl is the best option to give your rabbit the choice of where they want to drink. You will need to check their water at least twice daily to ensure that the water bottle is working correctly as the spouts can occasionally become blocked, and that the water bowl has not become soiled with bedding. This is vital in the winter months as the water can become frozen.

Food bowl

You will need to have at least one feeding bowl for your rabbits. It is important that this is sturdy so that it doesn't get knocked over, and is easy to clean. A ceramic bowl is best, as plastic bowls can easily be chewed making cleaning difficult and possibly causing injury to your rabbit. Ceramic bowls are also much heavier so unlikely to be knocked over by your rabbits.

Hay

Hay is a very important component of your rabbit's diet, so it is important to make sure that you have plenty of good quality hay available for them to eat. This should be sweet smelling, and mould and dust free. To prevent your rabbit's hay from becoming soiled in the hutch it can be placed in a hay rack to keep it off of the hutch floor.

Bedding

The best bedding to use in your rabbits hutch is a thick layer of newspaper or wood shavings (not saw dust) with a deep layer of straw on top as this is warm and absorbent. The straw must be dust and mould free.

Food

Whilst it is very important to make sure that your rabbit is fed the correct diet (please see our separate **Feeding your rabbit** pdf guidance sheet) you will need to make any changes gradually to prevent causing digestive problems. It will therefore be important for you to purchase a supply of the same diet as your rabbits are already being fed by their breeder. We can discuss your rabbits' nutritional needs in more depth once they have settled in and advise how to make changes to their diet.

Litter tray

It is possible to train a rabbit to use a litter tray, and this can make keeping the hutch clean and dry much easier. You can purchase specific rabbit litter trays which have a low front to enable your rabbit to get in easily and a high back to prevent the rabbit from going to the toilet outside of the tray. You can also easily use cat litter trays.

Toys and chews

Rabbits naturally like to gnaw on things, so it will be necessary to provide them with items to chew. If they are not provided with these, they are likely to chew on inappropriate items, such as the door of their hutch. To keep your rabbits entertained and interested it is always a good idea to provide them with different toys. Placing a couple of large logs in their runs is also a good idea.

Grooming equipment

Regardless of the length of your rabbit's coat, there will be times when you will need to give it a good brush. A soft bristle brush is ideal for general grooming but you may also need a slicker brush for when your rabbit is molting (to shed part or all of a coat or an outer covering of fur which is then replaced by a new growth). You are also likely to need to clip your rabbit's nails occasionally so it's advisable to purchase a pair of small nail clippers. At Hillside we can show you to do this safely and effectively.

Equipment for cleaning out the hutch

It's a good idea to purchase a separate dustpan and brush that you only use for cleaning out your rabbit's hutch. This is because they will be coming into contact with urine and faeces, and as such will not be hygienic to use them in your home.

Further information

- [Owning a rabbit guidance sheet \(pdf\)](#)
- [Feeding your rabbit guidance sheet \(pdf\)](#)
- <http://www.runaround.co.uk/> provide a system of interconnect-able runs and tunnels which can be used to give your rabbit safe access to the garden.

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