

Settling your rabbit into their new home

Arriving in their new home can be a stressful time for a rabbit so it's important to do everything that you can to help make this time as stress free as possible.

It's tempting to try and handle your rabbit in an attempt to try and calm them, but this often has the opposite effect. Some rabbits settle in to their new homes very quickly and take the change in their stride - coming to see you and wanting attention immediately.

However, most rabbits will initially be nervous, so once you arrive home it is best to leave them alone for the first day to allow them to become acclimatised to their new home and surroundings.

If you are keeping your rabbit indoors it will be especially important to ensure that they are kept somewhere quiet initially as loud noises are likely to scare them. Children are likely to want to spend time playing with their new bunny, but at least initially it is going to be important for this to be kept to a minimum to allow your rabbit to settle in.

It's important though to monitor your rabbit when they arrive home to ensure that they are eating and passing faeces. If a rabbit does not eat properly this could lead to problems with their guts.

When you bring your rabbit home from the breeder it's a good idea to ask them for some of the rabbit's bedding from the hutch they were living in. This bedding will smell of your rabbit and any companions they had living with them. Placing it in their new hutch with the familiar smell, will help them to settle in much quicker.

Initially start by just sitting beside their hutch and talking quietly to him/her. Hopefully they will not be too nervous of you and might approach you to see what you are doing. If they do, then you can try offering them something to eat through the wire. Next you can try allowing them to approach you and sniff your hand. You can then try gently stroking them in their hutch, waiting for them to be happy with this contact before moving on to actually picking them up.

Remember though that rabbits are prey animals and may initially struggle when picked up. It is important to progress slowly, allowing your rabbit to become used to each stage of you handling them before moving on to the next. That way you will have a happy bunny.

Another way to help gain your rabbit's confidence is to let him/her loose in a secure room and then simply lie on the floor. Most rabbits can't resist coming over to have a little sniff and see what you are doing.

Use the same process to introduce any children in the family to your new bunny. Young children are likely to be excited about getting to know their new pet, but it's important to ensure that they are not too noisy or lively – this may scare your rabbit. Always supervise them at all times so that neither the rabbit nor child gets injured.

Finally, once your rabbit has settled in you will need to introduce them to any other pets in the household. Again, introductions should be made slowly and you should remove the other pet from the room if your rabbit becomes stressed at any time.

Remember, rabbits are a prey species and dogs and cats are natural predators for them. It is possible however, that a very confident rabbit may try to dominate the other pet. Start by keeping the rabbit in its hutch and then allowing the dog or cat into the room or garden. It's likely that they will be interested in the rabbit, and will probably go over to the hutch to have a good sniff at them.

Likewise, your rabbit may be interested in the dog or cat and come over to investigate them through the wire. Do not allow the dog or cat to dig or paw at the wire and if they start to bark or do anything to scare your rabbit then you should remove them straight away.

Repeat this process several times until your rabbit and other pets are happy with each other's presence before allowing the dog or cat to be around the rabbit when they are outside of their hutch – for instance when he/she is having a cuddle on your lap.

Again, do not allow the other pet to do anything to scare the rabbit and ensure that there is another person available to assist you and remove the other pet should the need arise. Gradually, through repeated exposure to each other your pets should hopefully learn to be comfortable with each other's presence. It's not advisable however to leave pets of different species together unsupervised at any time, no matter how well they seem to get on whilst you are there.

Best of luck with making your new rabbit comfortable and happy in their new home – if you need any help or advice, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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