



RABBITS AS PETS



When choosing a new member of the family, many people opt for a “small animal” such as a rabbit, which is thought of as undemanding and easy to care for. However, caring for rabbits properly requires a lot of time and knowledge. With the principles of animal welfare in mind, rabbits should always have at least one companion, and should be kept in an outdoor enclosure that is arranged to resemble their natural habitat as closely as possible.

In brief

- **Rabbits are not cuddly toys!** The pleasure of having rabbits as pets should come from watching these fascinating animals. This means that they are not suitable pets for children under ten.
- **Life expectancy:** seven to ten years.
- **Where to get rabbits:** Give a nice new home to rabbits from an animal sanctuary or rescue centre. Do not buy rabbits from pet stores or other commercial sources, as this will only support the poor breeding and keeping conditions prevalent in the industry!
- **Keeping:** It is essential to give rabbits a species-appropriate enclosure of at least ten square metres, which is arranged to resemble their natural habitat. Only this will allow them to live and behave naturally.
- **Breeding:** Rabbits are ready to breed from the age of ten to twelve weeks. Bucks should be neutered before this. Adult females are ready to become pregnant again immediately after they give birth.
- **Time:** Looking after these animals takes at least one hour per day.
- **Allergies:** Rabbit fur, straw and bedding can trigger allergies in humans.
- **Holidays:** Before you get rabbits, make appropriate arrangements as to where and how they will be looked after when you go away on holiday!
- **Costs:** Alongside the costs of acquiring the rabbits, buying and equipping the enclosure and organic food and bedding, come the veterinary costs for vaccinations. Note also that rabbits often suffer from tooth displacement!
- **Food:** No grain foods, please. Fresh hay is the staple food of rabbits. Fruit and vegetables, together with twigs from fruit trees, bring variety to their diet.
- The enclosure should be well insulated and offer enough protection from the weather.
- Two rabbits will need at least ten square metres.
- Rabbits love to dig and jump, so the fence of the enclosure should extend at least 50 cm below ground, and be at least 150 cm high.

- The enclosure should be easy for the owner to clean (include a door that can be securely closed) and should keep predatory animals out.

Keeping indoors

FOUR PAWS does not recommend keeping rabbits indoors. The following advice is for people who already own rabbits, but cannot keep them permanently outside.

- All the indoor and outdoor cages and hutches available as standard are too small and are unsuitable for rabbits! To keep a rabbit indoors, the minimum acceptable arrangement is an indoor run of at least ten square metres.
- The rabbits should be able to eat, dig and hide away. Electric cables and poisonous plants should be kept out of the way.
- The rabbits' living area should be quiet and bright, and away from draughts and strong sources of heat. Balconies are not suitable due to the danger of heat build-up.

Read up all you can about the right way to keep rabbits.



Above: Rabbits spend a lot of the day eating. Design their enclosure creatively.

Centre: An example of an ideal exterior.

Below: Rabbits are social animals that live together in groups.



More Humanity towards Animals

