

JIM'S PET PAGE



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Happy Bunnies

Rabbits are the third most popular pet in the UK but as a vet we often only see them at the surgery when they are poorly and needing medical treatment. Rabbits are often thought to be easy pets to look after and good as a child's first pet but this is often not the case. Rabbits like company, need a large area to exercise in, a varied diet and often don't like being picked up and cuddled. They can make fantastic pets for older children and adults alike with many owners now keeping rabbits in the house as they can be easily trained to use a litter tray. A word of warning if you decide to have your rabbit inside – watch your electric cables as it is not uncommon for house rabbits to have a good old munch!

Rabbit Breeds

In 1995 there were 61 breeds and 531 varieties of rabbit recognised in the UK varying from the smallest – the Netherland Dwarf Rabbit



To the largest, the British Giant



And possibly the furriest, the Angora



The commonest breeds we see at the Blake Veterinary Group are the Dwarf, French and mini Lop, Lionhead, Rex and English.

It is best to talk to your veterinary surgery as to which breed of rabbit will suit you and your family the best.

Husbandry – hutches, bedding etc.

Rabbits are traditionally kept outdoors in a hutch, but can also be kept indoors as a house pet and are easy to litter train.

Hutches – hutches available from pet shops are usually too small as the sole accommodation of a rabbit. A good hutch must be dry, have a draught-free secluded nest area and an area for exercise. Hutches should be large enough to allow a rabbit to stretch out and up fully, at the very least. Outdoor hutches should be raised off the ground and protected from wind and rain. Direct sunlight should be avoided as

rabbits cannot sweat leaving them at risk from heat stroke. Good ventilation is also important to prevent respiratory diseases. Hutches should be cleaned at least once a week but your rabbit should be checked every day, particularly in the summer months when they are at risk from fly strike.



<< example of good rabbit hutch>>

Bedding – must always be provided and should consist of a layer of newspaper or wood shavings (not sawdust as this can cause breathing problems) plus straw, or straw alone.

Exercise area – an exercise area must always be provided in addition to a hutch. Remember that rabbits can dig deep burrows, so measures to prevent escape should be taken such as digging the wire mesh of the run below ground level. The top of the run should also be covered to prevent attack from e.g. cats or if you live in the countryside, birds of prey. Bolt holes should also be provided to allow your rabbit to hide e.g. drain pipe or cardboard boxes.

Companions – rabbits are social animals and should be provided with a rabbit companion wherever possible, however guinea pigs and rabbits are not the best of friends so avoid pairing them up whenever possible.

Diet

A real bug bear of mine! Often when we see rabbits at the surgery they are being fed on pretty, multi coloured dried food and most owners tell me that their rabbit likes to pick out the coloured green, orange and yellow bits and leave the dark green pellets! A bit like children a rabbit will often choose the tasty bits of food and leave the least palatable bits and like with children the bits left are usually the bits that are the most nutritious and the ones they most need!



Commercial Rabbit Food

To avoid your rabbit doing this, you should feed a complete food where the whole diet is squashed up together in one pellet thereby making sure your rabbit is getting all the vitamins, minerals and nutrients he should be.



Complete Rabbit Food

But probably more important, is to feed your rabbit as much hay as they can eat. Some rabbit experts advocate that rabbits should have very little dried food and their main source of food should be in the form of good quality hay e.g. Timothy Hay fed from hay racks or nets. Rabbit teeth grow continuously unlike our own teeth and grow at an amazing 1.5cm per month!!! So logic says to keep these teeth ground down and even, a rabbit needs to spend a lot of the day chewing which they are not able to do if fed only on dried food which is quickly crunched and swallowed.

Other rabbit favourites should include herbs, particularly parsley or coriander, small amounts of fruit and fresh vegetables. Suspend carrots from the ceiling or the hutch to act as an edible toy and to increase time spent feeding.

Cutest Rabbit Competition.

There is so much to discuss about rabbits that it is not possible to cover it all in one article. To encourage rabbits owners to come in and learn more about the care of their rabbit, the Blake Veterinary Group has decided to run a "Cutest Rabbit" competition from 1st to 31st March 2010.

There will be three categories and a prize for the winner of each category:

Cutest Baby Rabbit – less than one year old

Cutest Adult Rabbit – 1 – 6 years old

Cutest Wrinkly – over 6 years of age.

To enter, clients make a **FREE** appointment with one of our nurses who will discuss general health, husbandry, common illnesses of rabbits and can answer any other questions you feel you may want to ask. The nurse will then take a photograph of your rabbit and at the end of March all staff members of the Blake Veterinary Group will vote for the winners.

So all rabbit owners, contact your usual veterinary surgery on 01278 451592, Bridgwater or 01278 794794, Burnham on Sea.