

# All About Pets

*The national pet care information service*



## HOUSING YOUR RABBIT



THE BLUE CROSS

*Britain's pet charity*

*Whether your rabbit lives indoors or outdoors it needs somewhere to call home.*

Hutches and runs come in lots of different shapes and sizes. Choosing the right one is important to ensure that you have a happy rabbit.





## **Hutches**

### **Dimensions**

No hutch can be too large. The days when it was thought acceptable to keep rabbits in cramped, confined hutches are over. Two small rabbits should have a minimum hutch size of 150 x 60 x 60 cms and two large rabbits will need 180 x 90 x 90 cms at the very least. Your rabbit needs to have room to stretch out lengthways. It must be able to hop in the hutch and stand on its hind legs or it may get skeletal pain.

## **Partitions**

There should be at least two 'rooms' in your rabbit's hutch. The larger one should have a wire-fronted door and this is the area where your rabbit will eat and toilet. The other area should have solid walls and will be more private. Your rabbit will want to sleep here so provide it with lots of straw bedding.

## **Construction**

The hutch should be raised off the floor to allow air to circulate underneath it. The roof of the hutch must be waterproof. You can treat the outside of the hutch with wood preservative or paint to make it waterproof but do not paint or treat the wood on the inside – your rabbit will probably chew this and some chemicals can be harmful if eaten.

The hutch should be strongly built and secure to protect your rabbit from cats, dogs and foxes. Bolts are the best fasteners for the doors – they cannot be opened accidentally and will be safe against other animals.

Traditionally, hutches had wire floors – allowing the droppings to fall through and be cleared away. These are not suitable for pet rabbits as they can cause sore feet.

If you are going to use a second-hand hutch, you must disinfect it well with an ammonia solution (diluted bleach) and let it dry thoroughly before adding the bedding.

## **Cleaning out**

It is essential to clean the hutch regularly to keep your rabbit in good health. Most rabbits are very 'clean' – they will use one corner of their hutch as a toilet. This area should be cleaned out daily – use a dustpan and brush to sweep out the droppings. Then every seven to ten days, the entire bedding in the hutch should be replaced. Move your rabbit to an outdoor run while you do this. Ideally leave the hutch empty of bedding for a couple of hours to allow the wood to dry out.

Rabbits that are kept in unsanitary hutches are likely to develop conditions such as snuffles, sore feet, urine scalding, dirty bottoms, and fly strike (a condition where blow flies lay their eggs on the rabbit and the maggots bury into its skin). This condition can be fatal.

## Outside runs or ‘arks’

### Dimensions

Runs allow your rabbits to exercise and graze on grass. Ideally, your rabbit should have two hours of exercise in its run every day (except in bad weather). There are no recommended dimensions for a run – some people can make a secure, safe run for their rabbit out of the whole of their garden, others prefer a smaller run which is lightweight and can be moved to a fresh piece of lawn every day. Rabbits should be able to take a few hops around their pen.

### Construction

Runs need to be very secure – your rabbit must not be able to escape and other animals (dogs, cats and so on) must not be able to get in. The weight of the run is quite important – it must be too heavy for your rabbit to tip up, or for a dog to nudge over. Wire pegs are a good idea – these will pin the frame to the ground. Some runs have the wire netting extending over the floor of the run – the advantage of this is that your rabbit cannot dig its way out, the disadvantage that the wire may cause sores on your rabbit’s feet.

Runs are usually constructed with a wooden or metal frame with wire netting placed over this. It is important to provide your rabbit with some shelter in the run so it is protected from sun or rain. A sturdy cardboard box on its side with some straw inside will allow your rabbit to shelter.

Don’t forget that your rabbit can still get thirsty while it is in the run – remember to add a bowl of water or a drinking bottle.



## Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit [www.allaboutpets.org.uk](http://www.allaboutpets.org.uk), the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



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