



Rabbit Rearing Handbook

Description

Part 1: Raising Rabbits

1. Introduction

Raising rabbits is a popular activity in Europe and North America. They produce large amounts of meat, are easy to raise, and their manure is excellent fertilizer. With a few simple rules—building a good hutch, starting with healthy animals, and providing proper care—anyone can raise rabbits successfully.

2. Preparing to Raise Rabbits

Choosing the Breed of Rabbit

- Rabbits are categorized into small, medium, and heavy breeds. For meat production, medium breeds like the New Zealand, California, and Palomino are ideal due to their rapid growth.

The Hutch

- A good hutch should provide air circulation, sunlight, protection from weather, a quiet environment, and a self-cleaning floor. Each rabbit needs its own cage, water container, and grass manger.

Protection From Weather

- Rabbits tolerate cold better than heat. Protect them from rain, wind, and direct sunlight by using plastic sheets or gunny sacks over wire netting during adverse weather.

Self-Cleaning Floors

- Use 1 cm (1/2 inch) square wire netting for the floor to keep the hutch clean and dry, preventing

disease.

Preparations for Feeding

- Grass should be placed in a manger, not on the floor, to keep it clean. An automatic water container made from a large bottle and tin can ensure rabbits have fresh water at all times.

3. Caring for Rabbits

Check New Stock Carefully

- Ensure new rabbits are active, alert, have bright eyes, clean noses, ears, and fur, and dry feet free of sores.

Handling Rabbits

- **Adult Rabbits:** Lift by the loose skin over the shoulders and support the rump.
- **Small Rabbits:** Hold between the hips and ribs with the heel of the hand facing the tail.
- **Heavy Rabbits:** Grasp the skin over the shoulders and support the rump, keeping the rabbit's head under your arm.

Feeding Rabbits

- **Elements in Foods:**
 - **Protein:** Essential for growth and health. Sources include peanuts, soybeans, sesame, linseed, hempseed, and cottonseed.
 - **Salt:** Provide a salt lick in each cage or add 0.5% salt to the food.
 - **Vitamins and Minerals:** Fresh green plants, root crops, and high-quality hay supply necessary vitamins and minerals. Ensure a balanced diet.
- **Foods:**
 - **Cereal Grains:** Oats, wheat, barley, and grain sorghums can be fed whole. Crushed corn can also be given. Avoid moldy grains.
 - **Green Feeds and Roots:** Include green plants and root crops like sweet potatoes, carrots, and turnips. Avoid letting greens become heated or dirty.
 - **Dried Plants (Hays):** Luzerne, clover, and peanut hays are excellent. Ensure hay is of good quality.
 - **Commercial Feeds:** Use complete feeds containing 15-20% protein, 3-5.5% fat, and 14-20% fiber.
 - **Other Foods:** Kitchen scraps and stale bread can be given, avoiding greasy and spoiled food.
- **Proper Amounts and Combinations of Foods:**
 - **Bucks:** Hand-feed to prevent them from becoming fat and lazy. Provide a balanced diet with concentrates and greens.
 - **Does:** Feed according to weight and condition. Adjust diet during pregnancy and lactation to support the doe and her litter.

4. Breeding Rabbits

How to Mate Rabbits

- Place the doe in the buck's cage and allow one or two falls before removing her. Record the mating date immediately.

Feeling for Young Rabbits

- Check for pregnancy by gently feeling the doe's abdomen 14 days after mating.

Kindling

- Provide a nest box 5-7 days before the expected kindling date. Check for dead kits after birth and ensure the doe has adequate protein to avoid eating her young.

Weaning

- Wean kits at eight weeks and breed the doe again on the same day. Strong does can be bred 6-7 weeks after kindling if properly fed.

Determining Sex

- At weaning, examine the genital openings to determine the sex of the kits.

Orphan Litters

- Feed orphaned kits with cow or goat milk from a bottle until they can eat solids. Maintain hygiene in feeding equipment.

Balancing Litter Size

- Transfer kits from large litters to smaller ones to balance the sizes.

Failures to Conceive

- Ensure proper diet and avoid breeding old or injured rabbits. Keep detailed records to monitor breeding success and make informed culling decisions.

5. Keeping Records

Get a free record keeping template here: <https://rabipoa.com/rabbit-management-sheet/>

Basic Records

- Maintain individual records for each rabbit, tracking mating, kindling, and weaning dates, as well as litter sizes and weights.

Complete Record Keeping

- Use detailed records to improve breeding success and overall profitability. Evaluate both does and bucks based on their performance to make informed culling decisions.

6. Rabbit Diseases and Their Control

Also read: <https://rabipoa.com/common-rabbit-diseases/>

Coccidiosis (Intestinal)

- Prevent by maintaining clean hutches and using appropriate medication.

Ear Mange

- Treat with a solution of 0.25% Lindane in vegetable oil or a mixture of iodoform, ether, and vegetable oil. Check all rabbits for infestation.

Colds

- Provide fresh greens and reduce concentrates temporarily. Ensure hutches are clean and dry.

Sore Hocks

- Treat by cleaning affected areas and applying ointments. Maintain proper hutch conditions to prevent recurrence.

Sore Eyes

- Clean with water or boric acid solution and apply ophthalmic ointment if necessary. Isolate infected animals.

Skin Mange

- Treat with warm soapy water and sulphur. Isolate infected animals and clean hutches thoroughly.

Mucoid Enteritis (Scours or Bloat)

- Manage by adjusting diet and providing small amounts of green food and water.

Pneumonia

- Treat with antibiotics and keep the rabbit warm and dry. Monitor does closely before and after kindling.

Caked Breast (Caked Udder)

- Manage by reducing concentrates, providing green feed, and ensuring proper nursing. Isolate and treat infected does promptly.

7. Killing, Skinning, and Tanning Rabbits

Killing and Skinning a Rabbit

- **Killing:** Hold the rabbit by its hind legs, head pointing down. Quickly chop the back of its neck with the edge of your hand or a stick, or dislocate the neck by pressing down on the neck with your thumb and pulling the rabbit upwards.
- **Skinning:** Hang the rabbit by one hind leg, cut off the head, front feet, and one hind foot. Cut the skin from the remaining hind leg to the tail, peel the skin down, and remove the intestines.

Tanning a Rabbit Skin

- **Preparation:** Slit the skin up the middle, tack it on a board, and let it dry completely. Soak the skin in cool water, work over it with a coarse file, and remove all grease.
- **Cleaning:** Wash the skin in warm water with soda or borax, rinse, and dry. Then wash it in gasoline to remove any remaining grease.
- **Tanning:** Dissolve alum in water, add soda, and salt water, then mix well. Apply the paste to the skin side of the hide, reapply as needed, and let it sit for several days. Finally, wash the skin in soda or borax water, rinse, and stretch the skin until soft and dry.

Part 2: Hutch Construction

1. Wood Hutch with Metal Roof

Materials Needed:

- Packing cases
- Four eucalyptus poles
- 14 strips of pine
- 1 cm (1/2 inch) square wire netting
- One flat sheet of galvanized iron
- Binding wire

Construction Steps:

1. Frame Construction:

- Assemble the basic frame using eucalyptus poles and pine strips. Ensure all edges are flush to allow droppings to fall through easily.

2. Wire Netting:

- Stretch the wire netting tightly across the frame for the floor. This will help in keeping the hutch clean by allowing droppings to fall through.

3. Roof:

- Attach the galvanized iron sheet as the roof. Ensure it provides sufficient overhang to protect the rabbits from rain and sun.

4. **Sides:**

- Build the sides of the hutch with pine strips, leaving openings for ventilation. For areas with harsh weather, consider using additional materials to provide more protection.

5. **Doors and Mangers:**

- Construct doors for each cage using pine strips and wire netting. Attach mangers to the outside of the hutch for easy access to food.

6. **Finishing Touches:**

- Ensure all wire edges are turned down to prevent injuries to the rabbits. Clean the hutch thoroughly before introducing rabbits.

2. **Wood and Bamboo Hutch**

Materials Needed:

- Teak frame
- Bamboo strips
- 1 cm (1/2 inch) square wire mesh
- Nails
- Waterproofing substance (e.g., creosote or solignum)

Construction Steps:

1. **Frame Construction:**

- Assemble a teak frame and attach the wire mesh floor. Ensure the frame is sturdy and well-supported.

2. **Bamboo Sides:**

- Nail full-length strips of bamboo along the back wall. Use double walls of bamboo strips for dividers between cages and single walls for the end sides.

3. **Nest Boxes:**

- Incorporate wooden crates as nest boxes in the outside wall of each end cage.

4. **Roof:**

- Split bamboo lengths into halves, remove the nodes, and paint the inside surfaces with a waterproofing substance. Nail the bamboo pieces onto the top of the hutch frame in an interlocking pattern, ensuring sufficient overhang for weather protection.

5. **Doors:**

- Frame a door for each cage and cover with bamboo strips. Attach the doors to the hutch with hinges and secure with latches.

3. **Worm Husbandry**

Utilizing Rabbit Manure

- Rabbit manure is an excellent food source for earthworms, helping to create high-quality fertilizer. To grow earthworms, follow these steps:

1. Preparation:

- Dig pits or use shallow bins below the hutch floors. These can be made from cement, cinder blocks, or lumber (2 x 12") and should be sunk a few inches into the ground.
- Ensure pits are slightly larger than the hutch to catch all manure pellets.

2. Stocking with Worms:

- Use "pit-run" worms, available from earthworm growers or other rabbit raisers. Start with a mix of 50% rabbit manure and 50% peat moss or fine compost.
- Line the bottom and sides of the pit with 1 cm (1/2") square wire mesh if moles are a problem. A layer of crushed limestone can help with drainage and correcting manure acidity.

3. Maintenance:

- Keep the pits moist by sprinkling with water. Empty the rabbits' water crocks into the worm bins when refreshing their water supply.
- Level the pits regularly as the compost grows and fork over the bin contents every 2-3 weeks to keep it loose.

4. Harvesting Worms:

- When the bins become too full, fork out excess worms and place them in the garden, flower beds, or greenhouse. Alternatively, they can be sold.

Recommended Reading:

- Comprehensive Guide to Rabbit Raising, 5th Edition: Breeds, Care, and Housing Solutions

[Storeys-guide-to-raising-rabbits](#)

Category

1. Resources

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