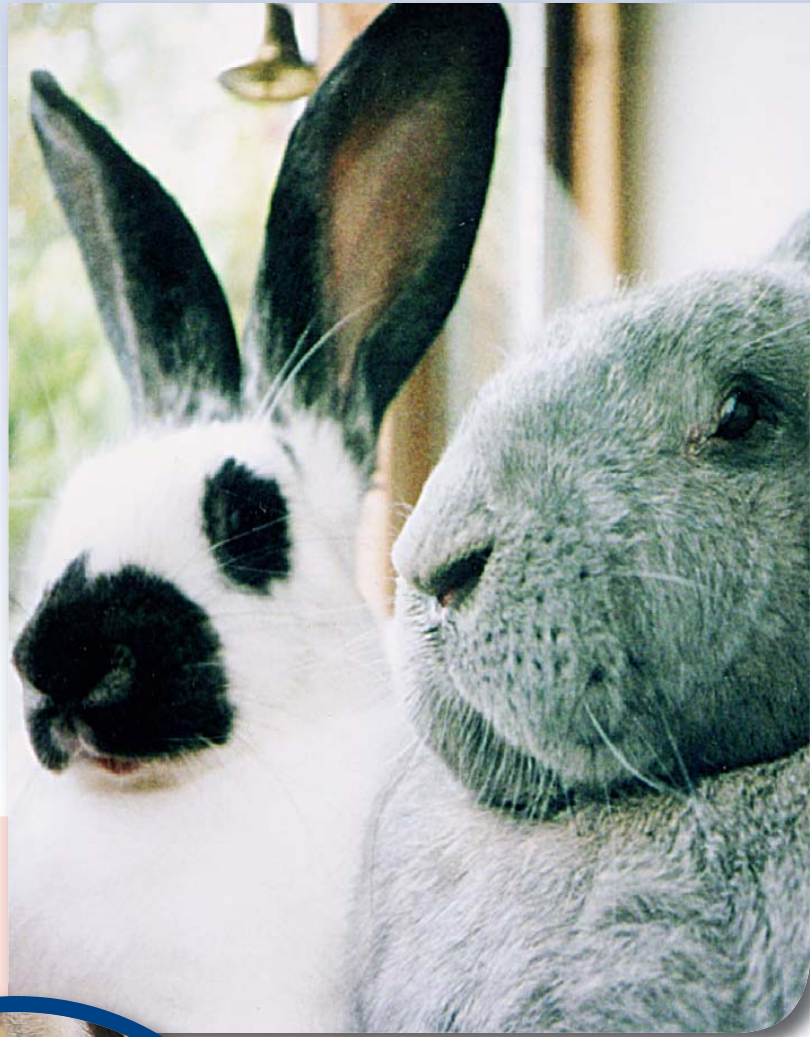


BUNNY BUDDIES

Why every rabbit needs a friend

TWO IS COMPANY. Rabbits evolved to live in groups, never alone. Keeping a single rabbit deprives your pet of one of his most fundamental requirements; the company of his own kind. Some people keep just one rabbit indoors as part of the family with plenty of human company. But once you have witnessed a bonded pair of rabbits grooming each other, lying down together, and eating together, it's unlikely you will ever want to return to keeping a solitary rabbit. This pdf explains how you can successfully pair your rabbit with another bunny friend.



THE BASICS

Introductions have to be conducted carefully. Rabbits may be sociable, but they're also territorial. You can't just bring a strange rabbit home and expect your resident rabbit to realise the love of his/her life has arrived!

Both rabbits must be neutered, if they are old enough. If you already have a rabbit, arrange for him/her to be neutered and wait a few weeks before adopting the second rabbit. It's never too late to get a friend for your existing rabbit; there are many cases where older bunnies have spent their twilight years happily with a new companion.

WHAT COMBINATION?

The easiest pairing is neutered male/female. So if you already have one rabbit, choose a companion of the opposite sex! Same-sex pairs can be tricky, but it is possible to keep two males or two females if they have grown up together providing their environment is right.



You'll need to find either a pair of siblings, or two rabbits from different litters both between 8 and 10 weeks of age.

It's vital that both rabbits are neutered as soon as possible, before any fighting has occurred. Same-sex pairs must never be separated, even for short periods of time. Even then, many will have occasional squabbles. Any visiting rabbits may upset the balance and trigger fighting.

With same-sex introductions, if one or both of the rabbits is already adult, introductions should only be undertaken with great caution and expert advice. Such introductions are possible, but success is not guaranteed. There's a lot more potential for serious fighting than when introducing opposite-sex pairs.

WHERE DO I GET MY RABBIT?

The best place to find your second bunny is at a rescue centre. Not only will you be giving a home to a bunny in need, but a rescue rabbit is likely to be neutered and vaccinated already.

Many rescue centres have some expertise in pairing up rabbits, and will often allow you to bring your own rabbit along to the centre to meet potential partners on neutral territory. Some rescues have facilities to board rabbits and will supervise the introduction process for you. With a bit of luck, you'll find a "love at first sight" match for your rabbit. If you are about to obtain your first rabbit, please consider adopting a bonded pair from a rescue centre.





If you need to take one of your buns to the vet for a post-neuter check or vaccination then it's a good idea to take both together in a carrier in the car. Because this is a stressful situation, the rabbits are likely to stick together for comfort rather than trying to squabble. You should only do this if you are going to the vet already; it is not fair to put your rabbits through the stress needlessly.

HOW DO I INTRODUCE TWO RABBITS?

Two baby rabbits (under 10-12 weeks of age); or a "love at first sight" couple, can live with each other immediately. All other combinations will need to be carefully and gradually introduced. There are many different ways to introduce two rabbits, all of which have their devotees. The scheme outlined below isn't the quickest, but it is easy to follow and it nearly always works. Both rabbits should be wormed upon the arrival of the new rabbit, discuss this with your vet and make sure both rabbits are healthy before you start.

1. Both rabbits need to be neutered, if they're old enough.
2. Put the rabbits in nearby enclosures, where they can sniff each other through wire. If your existing rabbit is free-range, put the new rabbit in a cordoned-off section of this area. The rabbits will start to get used to each other's scent. To help this you can also swap their litter trays over, or rub a cloth over one bunny and then the other.

3. Once the rabbits are used to the sight and smell of each other, start putting them together for very short periods of time in strictly neutral territory where neither has been before - try the bathroom!

At the slightest sign of tension, separate the rabbits. Try again next day, gradually increasing the time the rabbits spend together. A little bit of chasing and nipping is normal, but it's better to separate the rabbits too soon than risk an all-out fight.

4. Repeat this until the bunnies are relaxed together. You can assist this process by feeding the rabbits together, and providing lots of cardboard boxes and hidey holes so that they don't have to stare at each other.

Rabbits are very territorial and any competition for resources will elongate any aggression so ensure you have one of everything (feeding station, water bowl, hidey hole) for EACH rabbit.

5. When the rabbits are happy to groom each other and lie together, they can be left together unsupervised.

The whole process can take anything from a couple of hours to a couple of months. The better the rabbits get on at their first

meeting, the quicker they will bond. And if you are able to put the rabbits together for very brief periods, every day, they'll get used to each other far more quickly than if you do it less often.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Some rabbits will establish an instant bond. You can recognise this by an initial lack of interest when first introduced followed by individual grooming. This will soon progress to mutual grooming and the rabbits sitting together. Do keep a careful eye on a "love at first sight" couple for any possible aggression, but if all goes well, don't separate them.

WHAT ABOUT A GUINEA-PIG?

Contrary to popular opinion, rabbits and guinea pigs do not make ideal cage mates. Although some rabbit/guinea pig pairs get on well, many more end in disaster, often with injuries to one or both animals.

If you have a rabbit and guinea pig living together happily let them stay together but make sure the rabbit is neutered, or the guinea pig is likely to be sexually harassed. Male guinea pigs may also need to be castrated. Take care with their diet; guinea pigs need vitamin C daily, whereas rabbits don't. You must always provide a hidey-hole where the guinea pig can escape from the rabbit.

Please think twice before starting off with this combination; your rabbit will be much happier with a companion of his own species and the same goes for the guinea pig. A guinea pig is not a cheaper, easier friend for your rabbit than another rabbit.

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