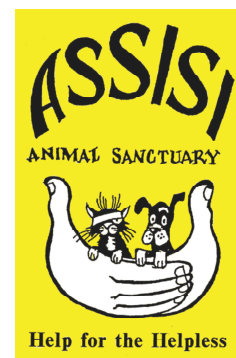


## Rabbit / G.Pig Adoption Guidelines & Checklist.



Guidelines for rabbit and guinea pig housing:

### Minimum requirements:

*Rabbits (Pair): Hutch & Run or Shed & Run*

- Hutch - Double storey living. 6ft (L) and each storey to be 2ft (D) x 2ft (H).
- Run – 8ft (L) x 4ft (W) x 2ft (H). Can be attached or unattached to hutch/shed.
- Shed – 6ft (L) x 4ft (W)

*Indoor rabbits (Pair):*

- 6ft (L) x 4ft (W) pen with access to bunny safe room for at least 4 hours exercise.
- Own room
- Free-range around fully bunny-proofed home.

*Guinea pigs (Pair) Indoors October – April:*

- Indoor cage- 120cm (L)
- C&C cage- 2x4 grid preferably with upper level.

*Outdoors:*

- Hutch- 4ft (L) x 2ft (D) x 2ft (H) single storey.
- Run- 6ft (L) x 4ft (W)
- Shed – 4ft (L) x 4ft (W)

The above are the **minimum requirements** for rabbit and guinea pig housing. Anything smaller will not be deemed suitable. However, if you have already purchased a hutch or cage we will endeavour to help you amend your housing so that it meets our requirements.

These requirements are set with guidance from the Animal Welfare Act NI (2011) and also the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund.

Please don't hesitate to ask us questions about what type of housing will suit you best. We can guide you through the whole process so that you don't spend any more money than you have to, but still end up with good quality, long-lasting housing for your rabbits or guinea pigs.

If you are taking on a single rabbit or guinea pig to be mixed with your own existing pet please discuss separate housing requirements. Temporary housing and an exercise area will be required for the new rabbit or guinea pig until they are a bonded pair and are able to live together in housing that meets the above requirements.

On the next page is a very basic checklist of all of things you will need to get you started. There is also a list of places and websites where all of the items required can be purchased. If you happen to find alternative stores or somewhere that is better value do let us know!

## Check List

	Items required	Got it..?
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hutch</li> <li>• Run</li> <li>• Shed</li> <li>• Indoor cage/pen</li> </ul>	
<b>Bowls/ bottles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 per rabbit for pellets</li> <li>• 1 large ceramic dish for water</li> <li>• 1 pellet dish for G.Pigs</li> <li>• 2-3 water bottles (handy to have a spare)</li> </ul>	
<b>Food</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science Selective Adult Rabbit</li> <li>• Science Selective Guinea Pig (Discuss alternatives)</li> <li>• Critical Care (emergency food for syringe feeding)</li> </ul>	
<b>Vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greens (spring/savoy/kale/herbs) –rabbits/ g.pigs</li> <li>• Pepper, carrot, apple, baby corn, cucumber, green beans, spinach, pear, mangetout etc... - G.Pigs</li> </ul>	
<b>Hay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meadow hay – soft &amp; dust free</li> <li>• Readigrass – dried grass</li> <li>• Herbal hay mixes</li> <li>• Compressed hay cakes</li> </ul>	
<b>Bedding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low dust wood shavings</li> <li>• Rapid Bed</li> <li>• Soft hay/ straw</li> <li>• Shredded paper/ Newspaper (staple free)</li> <li>• Fleece Blankets- G.Pigs/ Indoor rabbits</li> </ul>	
<b>Treats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dried vegetables/herbs</li> <li>• Fresh/ dried fruit in small quantities</li> </ul>	
<b>Toys/ Accessories</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hay stations</li> <li>• Tunnels</li> <li>• Hides/ Pigloos</li> <li>• Cardboard boxes</li> <li>• Nibble sticks</li> <li>• Puzzle toys</li> <li>• Grooming brush/ nail clippers</li> </ul>	

### Where do I buy all of these things?

#### *Housing:*

Wooden hutches/runs/sheds – [www.shedsni.com](http://www.shedsni.com) (Garden Leisure NI - Hogstown Road, Donaghadee.)

Indoor cage/ Guinea Pig cage – [www.zooplus.co.uk](http://www.zooplus.co.uk)

[www.petplanet.co.uk](http://www.petplanet.co.uk)

Jollyes Pet Superstore (Bangor)

Pets at Home (Bangor, Belfast, Lisburn, N'Abbey)

*C&C guinea pig cage -*

[www.cancguineapigcages.co.uk](http://www.cancguineapigcages.co.uk)

[www.cavycages.co.uk](http://www.cavycages.co.uk)

*Cage accessories/ treats/ food -*

[www.smallpawsplaytime.co.uk](http://www.smallpawsplaytime.co.uk)

[www.manorpethousing.co.uk](http://www.manorpethousing.co.uk)

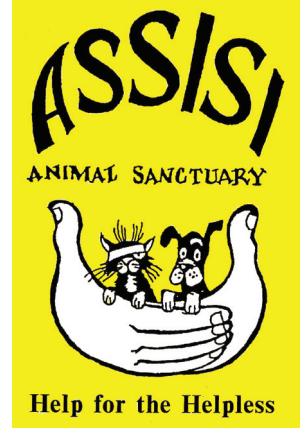
[www.barksandbunnies.co.uk](http://www.barksandbunnies.co.uk)

[www.hyperdrug.co.uk](http://www.hyperdrug.co.uk) (Oxbow Stockist)

Jollyes Pet Superstore (Bangor)

Pets at Home (Bangor, Belfast, Lisburn, N'Abbey)

# Making your home safe...



## 'Rabbit Proofing' explained.

Keeping your rabbits indoors is great, and many rabbits enjoy living in luxury. They get used to the noises in the house very quickly, even the Hoover! However, there are a few extra dangers in the home that you need to be aware of and 'rabbit proofing' your home is a must!

### **What does rabbit proofing involve?**

Rabbit proofing your home may sound like a difficult task however it can be easy to do, inexpensive and if done properly will only have to be done once. House proofing protects your home from destruction and your rabbit from harm.

### **Why is rabbit proofing your home so important?**

Rabbit proofing your home is essential whether you keep your rabbits indoors or outdoors. When your rabbits are in the house to play it is important that there are no dangers around. Rabbits love to chew and will readily destroy any cables or wires that are left exposed. Not only will this damage your appliances but will probably harm, or even kill the rabbit.

### **So how do I keep electrical cords out of reach?**

There are two simple methods for protecting wires;

- Plastic tubing (similar to that used in fish tanks) from a hardware or aquarium shop can be split lengthwise with a blade and the wire can be tucked safely inside.
- Wire-concealers that stick to the base of walls come in strips and corners, so they can follow the shape of the wall. This is a more costly and time consuming method than the clear plastic tubing above, but is more permanent and harder wearing.

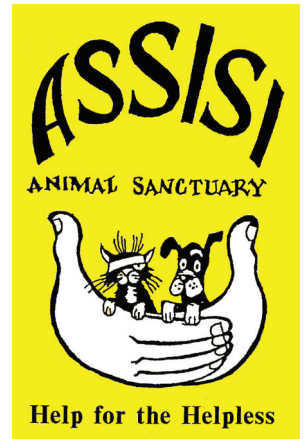
### **How do I protect baseboards and wooden furniture?**

You can purchase a furniture spray called Chew Stoppa Spray, from Pets at Home for an affordable price. Simply spray it on any exposed wood, as it has a bitter taste which will prevent the rabbits from chewing the wood. It is a pet safe and non-toxic spray.

### **How do I protect upholstered furniture and beds?**

Upholstered furniture and beds that are several inches off the ground are wonderful places for rabbits to hide underneath. However, some will burrow up into the soft underside and make a nest. A flat cardboard box smaller than the area of the furniture base, will keep the rabbit out, and won't be seen from human level.

# Biting the hand that feeds...



## Aggressive rabbits explained.

There are a number of different causes for aggression in pet rabbits. If a rabbit is aggressive it is practically shouting out "I am not happy!" So it is important we listen to them. To help our rabbits we must first understand why they are behaving in that way then try to change how we care for them and the environment which we provide.

### **Hormones**

Hormones are terrible things! They can turn the sweetest of baby rabbits into a raging demon bunny at just 5 months old. Not all rabbits will become aggressive, some may just spray urine at you or try to hump your leg. Either way it is vital that they are neutered.

Neutering will help calm the stress and anxiety that raging hormones cause leaving the rabbit much more calm, relaxed and able to enjoy your company.

### **Inadequate housing**

Can you imagine living in a tiny room with no space to move around and being unable to interact with your own kind? Rabbits aren't too keen on living like this either.

A lack of space and an environment that is uninteresting will cause stress, anxiety and frustration which manifest as aggression. These are the rabbits that will attack you if you put your hand into the hutch.

Providing a much larger hutch and a run that they can access freely along with tunnels, places to hide and also a dig box will settle even the most cage aggressive rabbit.

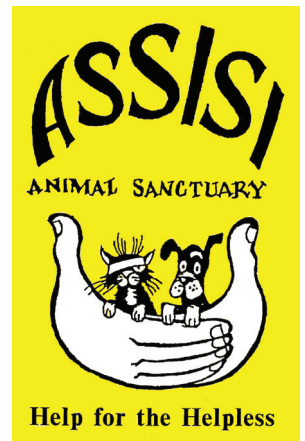
Never clean the hutch out while the rabbit is inside, respect their personal space. Or, if you are able to, house the rabbit in a converted shed for the ultimate happy bunny home!

### **Illness**

Sudden change in behaviour? Once friendly rabbit has turned aggressive overnight?

The rabbit could be unwell and in pain. Your first stop should be the Vet. Any sudden change in behaviour or habits should be noted and a veterinary appointment made to rule out a physical problem or the onset of an illness.

# Life is better together.



## Help your rabbit find a companion.

Bonding two rabbits together isn't as easy as just putting them in together and hoping they will get on. It is a process that has to be thought out carefully and can take anything from one day to a month or more.

Both rabbits must be neutered before attempting to bond them together. After a few weeks their hormones will have settled enough to enable them to be bonded more quickly and successfully.

### Stage 1

The initial meeting should take place in a neutral area. This is somewhere where the existing rabbit is not usually allowed and has no claim over it as its own territory. It must also be a large area with plenty of interesting toys and hides.

There may be some humping done by both rabbits, a bit of chasing or even a total lack of interest in each other. This is all normal. Only separate them if they fight. Do not leave the rabbits unattended.

### Stage 2

Over the next few days extend the time they spend together in the neutral area until they can spend the entire day together without chasing or fighting. At this stage you can begin to leave them for short periods, but check on them quietly so they don't know you are still watching.

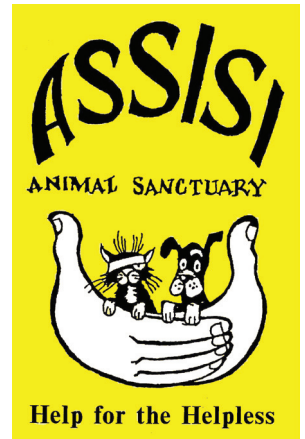
Once they can spend an entire day together in the neutral area you can move them into the run that they will be using as a bonded pair and observe.

### Stage 3

When they can spend a day together in their own run without any trouble they are ready to spend the night together in the same area.

Keep your eyes peeled for mutual grooming and cuddling, this is a sign they are settling in together and should have a long and happy relationship.

# Can't eat hay or won't eat hay?



## Fussy rabbits explained.

In the wild rabbits will have a diet that is made up almost entirely of grass, leaves and other forages, but quite often our pet rabbits miss out on that variety. To make up for that we can feed them a variety of different hays and allow them to have access to grass in our gardens or by picking it from safe, pollutant free areas.

Sometimes rabbits appear to be fussy and won't eat the hay we are offering. It can be very frustrating as hay is vital for good dental health. There is always a cause for this fussy behaviour.

### Dental health

The main cause of fussy eating habits is poor dental health. Some rabbits are genetically predisposed to bad teeth and others develop problems related to age or a poor diet early in life.

Diagnosing dental problems is fairly easy. A good, rabbit-savvy vet will be able to examine your rabbit's mouth and decide if treatment is necessary and how frequently treatment will be required.

With a comfortable mouth the rabbit may be more willing and able to eat foods that require plenty of chewing. It will just be a matter of finding out which type of forage they find most palatable!

### Types of tasty forage

**Timothy hay** - a lovely green, soft leafy hay with plenty of seed heads.

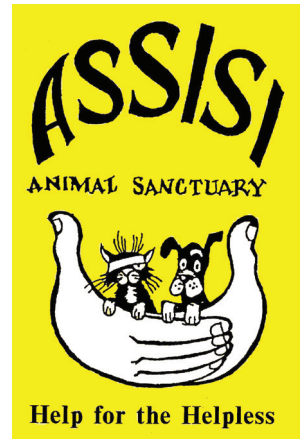
**Meadow hay mix** - often a blend of rye and timothy grass with rose or marigold.

**Compressed forage blocks** - hard blocks of compressed mixed grasses.

**Readigrass** - soft, green and fragrant dried ryegrass that is extremely palatable.

**Alfalfa** - fragrant, green legume with tasty leaves and stalks. Suitable as a treat only, not suitable for rabbits with bladder issues due to a higher calcium content.

# The importance of neutering...



It's more important than you think.

We all know the phrase 'breed like rabbits', but neutering your rabbit will do much more than prevent unwanted litters. A rabbit can breed every 4 weeks, but did you know that female rabbits don't have an oestrus cycle, they just come into heat as 'required'.

## What does neutering involve?

The operation itself is relatively simple, obviously neutering male rabbits is a much less invasive operation than it is for the females, but they will both recover quickly.

The vet will perform a pre-operative assessment to ensure the rabbit is fit and healthy and ready to be neutered. Most rabbits will return home the same evening, but occasionally some practices will keep the rabbit overnight to ensure it is comfortable and eating normally. Your rabbit may be discharged with a couple of days pain relief to be given at home, and a post operative check of the wound(s) may be required 4-5 days post op.

It is important you go to a 'rabbit-savvy' veterinary practice, so that they have a good understanding of rabbit anaesthetics and post operative care. Cost can vary, so call the practice to find out what they charge. We can provide you with contact details for 'rabbit-savvy' practices.

## Why should I neuter my rabbit?

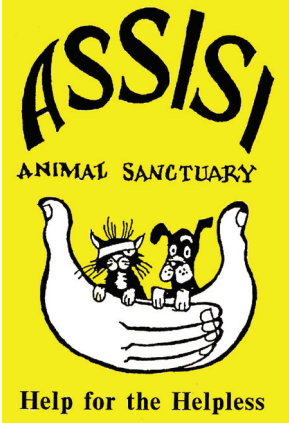
Rabbits are very driven by their hormones, and occasionally the increased hormone levels at sexual maturity can cause a behavioural change. The rabbit can become anxious, frustrated and sometimes even aggressive.

Male rabbits may try to hump you or your other pets, he may bite or chase and could also spray urine over you and your furniture to mark his territory. Neutering will calm these behaviours down but will not make him less affectionate.

As female rabbits don't have distinct hormone cycles they often just have a behavioral switch seemingly overnight. She may build a nest or become highly aggressive and territorial.

The incidence of Uterine Cancer in unspayed females aged 4 years and over is 80%. Neutering from 5 months old will prevent this. Signs of Uterine Cancer include a sudden change in behaviour, an apparent cycle of hormonal behaviours and abdominal pain, among others.

# Confidence building for nervous rabbits...



## The art of becoming friends.

Rabbits are naturally nervous and flighty which can make gaining their trust a long and tricky process. Careful handling and positive experiences when they are young will go a long way to having a happy, confident adult rabbit.

### **My rabbit is nervous, what should I do?**

Dealing with a nervous rabbit is not easy and it will take quite a long time to gain trust and build confidence. Surprisingly the approach to dealing with a nervous rabbit is a bit 'back to front'. Less really is more.

People often over handle a nervous rabbit to 'get it used to being handled'. Often the rabbit is unhappy with this, will wriggle, stress and have all its fears confirmed that people are just out to constantly try and cuddle it.

The right thing to do is take handling right back to a minimum. Only handle the rabbit to move it from one pen to another or to do a bottom check. Make sure the rabbit is never confined or cornered, and use a carrier to move a frightened rabbit. Just carefully usher it in. Hutches are a big 'no no' for nervous rabbits as they compound the fear of being trapped. If a hutch has to be used then you must never do anything to the rabbit inside the hutch, wait until it comes out of its own accord.

A large, interesting area is a must. Exploration is a great confidence builder, they will explore a little further each day. You can spend time sitting in the area and have tasty treats on your lap to encourage the rabbit to investigate. If you are able, lie down in the run, this will make you appear smaller and less intimidating.

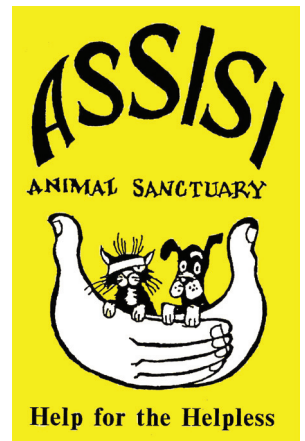
In time the rabbit will associate you with nice things and will readily come over to investigate! This is the stage where you begin to offer the rabbit gentle head rubs. Don't be offended if the rabbit runs away the first few times. Hold your hand out and it should come back to check you out.

### **How much should I handle my rabbit?**

Try not to over handle your rabbit. A quick cuddle once or twice a day is often enough, although some rabbits will choose to sit or lie on your lap! NEVER hold a rabbit on its back like a baby. This is called 'Tonic Immobility' and is a version of playing dead, the rabbit is NOT enjoying it.



# Caring for the elderly rabbit...



## Old rabbits need extra care too.

Just like humans rabbits age at different rates. One rabbit could be elderly at six years old while another may look and act like a two year old at eight years old. The average lifespan for a rabbit is 8-10 years but ultimately it all depends on genetics, lifestyle and sometimes just a bit of luck.

### **Age related arthritis**

Rabbits get arthritis too! It is very common for an older rabbit of five or six years old to begin to show signs of arthritis. The most common being arthritis of the spine, or Spondylosis. Like in humans it is a degenerative condition that can be managed once diagnosed.

As we all know too well rabbits are subtle, it is hard to tell if something is wrong because they hide it. They are also masters of pain management and have an amazingly high pain threshold so by the time you notice something is wrong the condition is often well advanced. Signs of spondylosis include difficulty grooming and eating caecotrophs from bottom, difficulty scratching ears, or dirty ears, hind limb weakness, or simply being heavy footed, loss of muscle over back due to inactivity and simply going off their food.

A vet will need to examine the rabbit and a diagnosis is made by doing an x-ray of the spine. Quite often strong pain killers are prescribed to get the pain under control and then daily doses of anti-inflammatory drugs such as Metacam are prescribed for the lifetime of the rabbit. Rabbits tolerate NSAID's well and providing they eat a good diet they should not have digestive troubles related to the use of NSAID's.

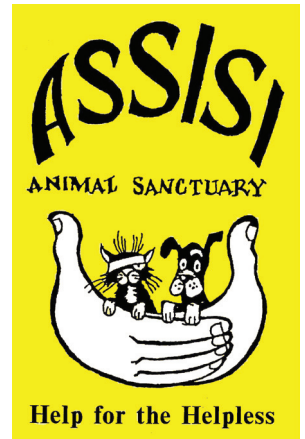
Complementary therapies such as acupuncture also work well for pain management in rabbits.

### **Management**

The level of care required will depend on how active your elderly rabbit is. If they aren't showing any signs of arthritis or other conditions then you don't need to change anything. Just make sure your rabbit is warm enough in the cold weather.

Rabbits that are severely arthritic or mildly disabled will need more day-to-day care such as bottom washing, gentle physio and medication. They will need to live indoors in an adapted enclosure or room. Fleece blankets make a comfortable, non-abrasive flooring. Low-sided litter trays are a must and plenty of comfy places to snooze help too.

# Making friends with your Guinea Pig...



Form a bond that will last a lifetime.

Guinea pigs make wonderful pets, they are cute, quirky and make the sweetest noises, but they are naturally nervous. It is very important that guinea pigs are well socialised from an early age so that they grow up to be happy, confident little piggies. Most guinea pigs think of their tummies first and foremost, so they are easily won over with their favourite treat. This method can also help even the most nervous of adult piggies.

## **The piggy must always be the 'winner'.**

When socialising any guinea pig it is important to remember that it is the piggy who must benefit from every interaction- not you. They must never feel trapped or harrassed, it must always be positive. That is where food comes in! Always offer a piece of their daily food ration or a little treat. This builds up the association that human = 'food provider'. This is a very important title to hold as you become the centre of their universe!

To start with, offer a piece of food everytime you approach the cage. Say 'hello' or whatever greeting you want to use and offer a piece of food. If the piggy is too shy to take it from your hand just set it quietly in front of it's nose. As this process is repeated over the coming days you will notice that the piggy associates you with something nice and may even start to anticipate you coming over. If you are lucky you will get a bit of squeaking and 'popcorning' with excitement.

## **Progress to daily handling.**

Handling is an important part of interacting with your guinea pig. We all want to pick them up and give them kisses, but this can be scary for a nervous piggy. Building up to this point is very important and requires a bit of patience.

Once your guinea pig is anticipating the food treat you are going to provide you can move on to teaching it that handling and cuddling is nice and that cuddles also equal food. Once a day gently scoop your piggy up in your hand, making sure that both the front and back ends are secure, set the piggy on your lap for just a few minutes and offer a tasty treat. The first few times your piggy may not eat its treat until it has returned to the cage. This is normal and is just down to nerves. After a few days your piggy should be quite content to sit in your lap and munch on a few snacks!