

THINKING OF ADOPTING AN ASSISI RABBIT?

Here is a brief run down of what we do and do not expect:

We do expect:

- A passion for rabbits
- An understanding of the level of care required
- Research to have been done into the feeding and care of rabbits
- Willingness to provide the rabbits with adequate housing, both in size and quality.
- Willingness to provide the rabbits with a loving and caring home for the rest of it's life, (10+ years)
- An understanding of a rabbits behavioural needs and the ability to provide an environment suited to their specific needs.
- An understanding of the potential future costs of veterinary bills if the animal develops a chronic condition.

We do NOT expect:

- You to have your accommodation already bought and set up.
- You to know what sort of rabbit you want.
- You to know everything about rabbits
- You to have past experience with rabbits
- You to know how to handle a rabbit

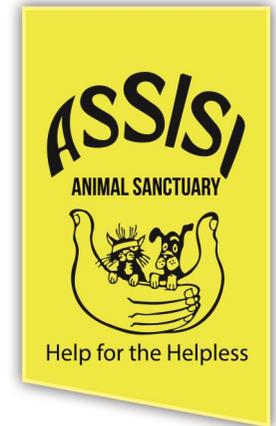
We are here to guide you through the whole process. We prefer you to come up and chat to us first before you go out to buy a hutch or run. That way we can guide you through what you need to buy or even build, so that you do not end up wasting your money on something that is not suitable.

When placing a booking on rabbits or guinea pigs we like them to go to their new home as soon as possible, ideally within two weeks of placing the booking. We will however hold the booking for up to four weeks as we understand it can take a bit of time to get the accommodation ready.

We are always at the end of the phone if you have any questions and we can be contacted by email at any time!

BUNNY BOOKLET

Some things you need to know...



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COSTS

Bunnies are very cute and appeal to people of all ages. If you are thinking about buying a rabbit, there are some important factors you will need to consider beforehand. Firstly, rabbits are very sociable creatures, and need to live in pairs, so you would in fact need to buy two!

You may be buying a bunny for your child, however, please understand that ultimately the rabbits will be the ADULTS responsibility and will rely on YOU to give the 10+ years of love, space, time, attention, patience, and understanding that they really need.

Prices vary but this is a rough estimate (per rabbit) to give you an idea of costs before buying a rabbit.

ONE-OFF COSTS

Hutch+Run/Other type of housing - £200 - £300

Bowls - £15 - £20

Spay/Neuter Fee - £50 - £100

ONGOING COSTS

Pellets - £50 (per year)

Fruit, Veg, Greens - £260 (approx. £5 per week)

Treats - £120 (Approx. £10 per month)

Hay - Approx. £100 (per year)

Annual Injection (Nobivac Myxomatosis) – £35

Annual Injection (Filavac RVHD2) - £35

Unplanned vet bills (emergency/teeth problem) - £25 - £100 (per time)

Check-ups – at least twice a year - £50 (Approx. £25 per check-up)

Toys and Enrichment – £60 (£5 per month)

On average, per year a properly cared-for rabbit costs over £850!

Please bear in mind that rabbits should be kept in pairs so double that price! (£1700 per year) on top of the initial one-off costs. Please don't keep a rabbit on its own to live a life of solitude just to save money. Pet insurance is recommended as rabbit bills can be very expensive!

HELPING YOUR RABBIT SETTLE IN

Your rabbit will need time to settle in and adjust to new surroundings and people.

This can take anything from 24hrs to months! It all depends on the rabbit.

To help your rabbit settle in, it is important that you do not over handle your rabbit. They will come to you, in their own time once they have adjusted to the new routine and people. Patience is key.

By carrying out normal duties, such as feeding, cleaning etc. your rabbit will get used to human interaction and feel comfortable in your presence. Talking to your rabbit will help them become accustomed to your voice. Offering tasty treats such as dandelion leaves or a small piece of fruit is a great way to gain trust! This will mean the rabbit will associate you with tasty things!!

When your rabbit is first settling in, a quick bottom check and cuddle is more than enough for most bunnies while they are getting to know you. As they become more confident, they may seek you out for attention. However some rabbits just aren't as affectionate and may never really 'enjoy' attention.

Behaviour to look out for:

Nudging your hand - 'I would like you to stroke me!' or 'I would like that treat you have there!'

Licking - 'I like you a lot'

Binkying - (leaps and twists in the air) 'I am very happy right now!'

Growling/Grunting - 'I am not very happy with you being near me right now. This is your first warning'

Nibbling - 'Could you please move out of my way. This is your second warning.'

Biting - 'I have already warned you, but you pushed it too far. Leave me alone NOW.'

Flicking/Stamping hind feet - I am a little bit annoyed, I will get over it, but don't be doing that



BUNNY BEHAVIOUR

Rabbits are by nature nervous animals, as in reality, they are 'prey' animals. To a rabbit EVERYTHING can be a threat, and it is up to us to reassure and teach our furry friends what is and what isn't something to be afraid of. Rabbits learn very well with a repetitive consistent daily routine. Gentle exposure to new things helps a rabbit become more familiar with it in their own time.

Some things that could stress your rabbits out include:

- Loud noises (banging, children screaming and shouting, barking)
- Environment (strong unfamiliar odours, being kept in a small space, being unable to move around freely, being unable to see around them, household noises)
- Other animals (dog, cats etc. they may never have encountered before)
- Other rabbits (unfamiliar rabbits are a threat to their territory)
- Incorrect handling (can cause pain and distress)
- Illness (feeling unwell)

Signs of stress include:

- When a rabbit is withdrawn and appears uninterested
- When a rabbit is frantic and shows repetitive behaviours (pacing, circling, bar chewing)
- When a rabbit is on edge (very flighty and afraid of things that it may not usually be)
- When a rabbit that is used to being handled, refuses to be
- Aggression towards other rabbits or redirection of aggression towards humans



FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

Having your rabbit on a healthy diet is very important as it can affect your rabbit's health in many ways. Forage such as hays, grass and dried grass should be the main component of a rabbit's diet. Lack of these forages can cause teeth problems such as malocclusion. This is where the teeth do not meet properly and therefore do not wear evenly causing the rabbit pain and discomfort. Vegetables and Pellets should be fed in moderation, as too much of these can cause obesity. Forage is 80% of a rabbit's diet, Vegetables 10% and Pellets 10%. Treats such as carrots, apples, pears and parsnip etc, should only be fed in moderation.

FRESH GREENS

Good: asparagus, basil, cauliflower leaves, celery, chicory, dill, fennel, green pepper, kale, mint, oregano, parsley, red leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, savoy cabbage, spinach, turnip, watercress, dandelion leaves.

Bad: Apple pips, avocado, carrots (whole), cucumber, iceberg lettuce, potato and potato tops, rhubarb (leaves and stalks), tomato leaves, locust pods and beans. This is not an exhaustive list, if in doubt, don't feed the vegetable/fruit to your pet.

HAY

Hay is a massive part of a rabbits diet. It must be available at all times! Some rabbits can be fussier than others, so it is important to find a hay your rabbits like the best, and stick to it!

There is no such thing as too much hay!!



HOUSING YOUR RABBITS

Rabbits are active animals, and by nature are very inquisitive, so it is important they are housed in suitable accommodation. Their accommodation should be as large as possible, ideally a large run incorporated into a multi-storey hutch, or if possible a large converted shed and outside run if they are living as an outside rabbit.

HOUSE RABBITS

Rabbits love to chew and gnaw, so when they're living indoors, the house needs to be rabbit-proofed. Wires are an easy target, so metal ducting may be useful to cover them up. Also, be aware of wooden and laminate floors which can easily cause your rabbits to slip, injuring the lower back.

OUTDOOR RABBITS

For outdoor rabbits, it's important to rat-proof the area where they're living. Fear of predators – like dogs, foxes and birds of prey – can cause stress, so try to minimise it. If a neighbour has a noisy dog, for example, house your rabbits as far away as possible. Ideally cover the hutch at night so that the rabbits cannot see outside should any predators enter the garden. You should also make sure the garden is free of plants that are poisonous to rabbits.



HOW DO I KNOW MY RABBIT

IS UNWELL?

Rabbits are prey animals and can hide an illness very well. So if your rabbit is actually showing signs of illness, this usually means they are very unwell indeed, as rabbits will commonly hide any illness for as long as they can. If you think your rabbit might be ill, it is advised to take it to a vet as soon as possible, as rabbits can go downhill extremely quickly.

Signs of Illness can be:

- An obvious wound or injury
- Changes in the types of food your rabbit likes
- Showing interest in food but not eating it
- Weight loss
- Lethargy
- Personality change
- Grinding of the teeth (can be a sign of pain)
- Sitting in a hunched up position as opposed to stretched out and relaxed

A weekly health check on your rabbits is advised, as you will become accustomed to what is 'normal' and what is not. During a health check you should look at your rabbits teeth, ears, fur, eyes, nails and bottom. If you have a set of scales, weighing your rabbit weekly will help you notice any change in their weight, be it losing weight or gaining!



DENTAL PROBLEMS

A rabbit's teeth are 'open rooted', which means they grow continuously throughout their lives. As a rabbit eats, the teeth wear down and maintain their own length. Problems with teeth can arise when there is an issue with the diet, or even a problem affecting the alignment of the jaw or growth of the teeth. Some rabbits can be born with misaligned teeth.

The biggest cause of dental problems is a lack of coarse fibre in the diet, for example - hay and grass, which require a lot of chewing. If there is a lack of coarse fibre in the diet, the jaw does not get used properly, and does not allow the teeth to wear down evenly.

To help with avoiding your rabbit developing any abscesses or ulcerations, you must make sure good quality hay is available at all times. Taking your rabbit to a vet every 6 months is advised to have their teeth checked for any abnormal tooth growth. Signs to watch out for of your rabbit potentially having any teeth problems include:

- Changes in appetite (savouring softer foods) or not eating at all
- Wetness around chin and on insides of the forelegs (drooling)
- Incisors are uneven
- Wetness around the eyes, or persistently watery eyes

'Cheek teeth' can develop a sharp edge which is commonly known as a spur. Upper molar spurs can ulcerate the cheek whilst lower molar spurs tend to ulcerate the tongue.



INDOOR RABBITS

Having your rabbits in the house makes it easier to interact with them and makes them more sociable, as well as easier for you to keep an eye on them for any changes in their health or behaviour. House bunnies are fun to watch and play with, the more confident they get you will see them exploring or jumping up onto your lap for a treat, or lying stretched out on the floor sleeping or grooming each other.

Rabbits can be litter trained, and once neutered there should be very few 'accidents' in the house. If your rabbits are not spayed / neutered then they will urinate or spray to mark their territory. As bunnies run around they will sometimes do a few droppings here and there, but these are dry and easily swept up.

Your bunnies will need somewhere secure to call their own; this can be a fenced off area of the room or their own room! They will still need lots of space, if not the whole house, to roam as well as their own private area.

Rabbits will by nature chew and dig where possible so ensure you rabbit-proof your home and remove potential hazards. For example, cover electric cables, keep house plants out of reach and collect up any dropped leaves or petals. Provide your rabbits with safe and suitable materials to gnaw on and dig in, and toys and hay to keep them busy so they are less likely to chew anything else!

Even though your rabbits will be living inside, it is important to allow them outside time in a secure area of your garden in the good weather!!

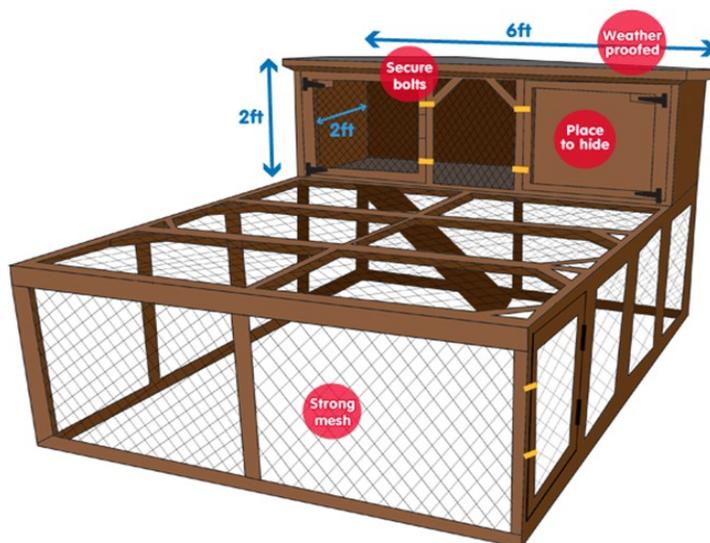


OUTDOOR RABBITS

Your rabbits will need a lot of exercise to keep them fit and healthy, as well as keeping them entertained and their minds active! If you are keeping your rabbits outside, your hutch must meet the minimum measurements, which according to the Animal Welfare Act is 6ft x 2ft x 2ft HUTCH + an additional 8ft x 4ft x 4ft RUN (or secure area to exercise in), and the 2 should be joined to allow rabbits to exercise when they want to.

A child's playhouse is another option you could consider, or ideally, their very own shed with a run attached. Outdoor rabbits need the additional run to their main housing so they can decide when they go outside to stretch their legs. It should measure at least 8ft x 4ft x 4ft to give them room to run and jump. They are very active, fast animals with powerful back legs, and they need a lot of exercise to prevent muscle wastage. If you are going to let them exercise loose in the garden you MUST always be outside with them watching them, and your garden must be bunny proofed - to stop them escaping, protect them from predators, and to prevent them from eating any poisonous plants.

Below is an example of what the minimum measurements are for outdoor accommodation.



OTHER TREATMENTS

As well as vaccinations, there are some other treatments your rabbits will need yearly, such as:

E.Cuniculi

E.Cuniculi is a protozoan infection which affects the rabbits brain and causes a head tilt. It primarily affects the nervous system (brain and spinal cord) and kidneys. E. cuniculi spores are spread in urine from an infected rabbit and are then eaten (or less commonly, inhaled) to infect another rabbit. The parasite can also be transmitted from mother to young during pregnancy. Other animals can be carriers of the parasite including wild rabbits and rodents. The most common wormer to treat this is known as Panacur Rabbit. This can be ordered from your vets.

Flystrike

Flystrike is a serious condition in rabbits. It occurs mostly in the summer months. Not only is Flystrike, or 'myiasis', extremely distressing, but it is also potentially fatal. Flystrike is caused by flies that are attracted to damp fur, urine, faeces and the odour of the rabbit's scent. The flies will land on the rabbit normally around the rabbits rear end and lay their eggs. Within a very short time of 2 hours the eggs will hatch into maggots. The maggots will then start to feed on the rabbit. This process happens very quickly and is not always caught in time. To prevent flystrike:

- Remove all soiled bedding daily
- Ensure that you are not overfeeding your rabbit, as this can result in diarrhoea which will attract the flies
- Check your rabbit twice daily to ensure that it is clean and dry
- Disinfect hutches every week



VACCINATIONS

In the UK there are 2 main deadly diseases that you **MUST** vaccinate your rabbits against:

Myxomatosis

Myxomatosis is a severe viral disease that can affect both outdoor and house rabbits. It is spread by biting insects such as fleas, mites and mosquitoes carrying the Myxoma virus, as well as rabbit to rabbit contact. It is a dreadful disease that causes immense suffering: affected rabbits can take a fortnight to die and treatment is usually futile, which is why euthanasia is usually recommended. Classic myxomatosis starts with runny eyes and in the very early stages can be confused with other causes of conjunctivitis. An unvaccinated rabbit with this disease will almost certainly die, a vaccinated rabbit can still catch the disease but the difference is that vaccination turns a fatal illness into one that is treatable.

Viral Hemorrhagic Disease

VHD is a highly contagious viral disease that can kill rabbits within 48 hours of exposure to the virus. It is spread via contaminated beings or objects; car tyres, shoes, wild birds, your pet dog, clothing you've worn somewhere there may be wild rabbits eg. woods, the park, etc. VHD is often a very swift and sudden killer, giving little warning. Rabbits may die without showing any symptoms at all. Some bleeding from the nose, mouth and rectum is sometimes seen.

Any sudden rabbit death is suspicious and should be reported to your veterinarian as a possible case of VHD.



EXAMPLES OF OUTDOOR ACCOMODATION



A hutch and run attached to an extra run by a plastic tube—giving the rabbits more space and somewhere else to investigate.

A child's playhouse attached to a run by plastic tubing. The playhouse is big enough for you to go in and spend some time with your rabbits.



A purpose built run, large enough for you to enter both the outside area and indoor area to spend time with your bunnies. Filled with lots of accessories there should be lots of things to keep your rabbits busy!

IS TWO BETTER THAN ONE?

YES!! Two bunnies are definitely better than one! In the wild, bunnies live in groups and are very social animals, so it makes sense to have at least two bunnies together. Whilst our human company is great, it is better for rabbits to have a friend, where they can talk the same language, understand each other's body signals, play, and groom, relax, eat together and look out for each other!

Pairing rabbits can be a time consuming process, though this is not the case for all rabbits, it is better to be prepared for at least 2 months of bonding!

Determining which two rabbits would be suitable for each other can be difficult, but is usually based on the personality of the rabbits. The most straightforward pairing is a neutered male and a spayed female. It is possible to have any pairing of males and females, especially if they've been brought up together from birth, but a male and female is the most likely to get along.

Pairing a rabbit and guinea pig together is a common misconception. Here are a few reasons why they should not live together:

- Rabbits and guinea pigs need different foods to meet their different dietary requirements.
- Rabbits and guinea pigs communicate differently so it is in both of their interests to have a friend that talks the same language.
- Rabbits are a lot stronger than guinea pigs and can easily hurt or even kill a guinea pig without meaning to, simply by kicking out with their powerful back legs.
- The rabbit may bully the guinea pig.
- Sometimes guinea pigs ingest rabbit fur which can cause them problems.
- Different space and exercise requirements.



BONDING BUNNIES

Many people have different methods of bonding, but we find that our way works the majority of the time. This is only a brief overview of what is involved in bonding bunnies, so please ask for more information from the rabbit staff about the bonding process.

If your rabbit has lived on his/her own for a while, the first step is getting them used to another rabbit being present. Splitting their enclosure in two is the best way to do this, with each rabbit on either side of the fence, they will be able to get used to the sight and smell of each other.

Swapping bunnies over to each others area helps, as this way rabbits cannot associate the side that they are on as being 'their side'. Swapping rabbits into each others area in the morning is advised, as litter trays are dirty, and scents are strong! Feeding both rabbits close to each other, with their separate bowls and still separated by the fence helps them get used to 'eating together' even if it is not yet out of the same bowl.

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. Lots of distractions are necessary, so treats, toys, and a tunnel for example. You will need to be in this area with them, with a towel at hand in case any fights need to be separated. A little bit of chasing and nipping is normal, so try and not intervene too soon, however if the situation is getting too intense, it is better to separate the rabbits too soon that risk an all-out fight.

All of this will need to be repeated until the bunnies are relaxed in each others company. 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. 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.

