

Burgess[™]
SINCE 1790
Excel[™]



THINKING ABOUT
GETTING RABBITS?

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STAMPING OUT
SELECTIVE FEEDING

MUESLI

FREE
Co.

A BRITISH FAMILY COMPANY

Burgess Pet Care is a British family company with a 300-year heritage. With our passion and expert knowledge we have been able to develop high quality and nutritious foods for a variety of animals from dogs to hamsters.

Our Excel brand was established in 1998 when we became the first company to make single component extruded nuggets for rabbits. In 2014 we supported research by the University of Edinburgh which highlighted the impact of muesli style diets on the health of rabbits. As a result of this research we stopped making muesli for all animals.



RABBIT AWARENESS WEEK

Every year we run our Rabbit Awareness Week campaign which helps to educate rabbit owners and potential owners about the welfare needs of these wonderful animals.

We have written this booklet to help you make a decision on whether rabbits are the right animals for you, we hope you find it informative.

If you have any further questions please contact us at consumer@burgesspetcare.co.uk.



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INTRODUCTION

There are lots of things to consider when getting rabbits, from the daily care that they need, to the financial commitment required throughout their lifetime.

Rabbits are often thought of as being the most suitable pets for children and being 'easy' to look after. In fact, rabbits have quite complex dietary needs and require a high level of commitment from their owners. Whilst it is lovely for children to enjoy the company of rabbits and help to look after them, the legal responsibility for any animal's welfare lies with adults.

This guide will take you through all the things you need to consider before getting rabbits so you can decide if they are right for you and your family.



THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS



DIET

Rabbits need high levels of fibre in their diet to keep their digestive systems working properly. Their diet should consist of 85-90% high quality feeding hay, a small portion of single component rabbit nuggets, a handful of fresh greens and the occasional high fibre treat. Fresh drinking water should always be available and topped up regularly.

Muesli mixes should not be fed as these can cause rabbits to selectively feed which can increase the risk of potentially fatal health problems (see our rabbit care guide for more information on this).



ENVIRONMENT

When thinking of getting rabbits you should consider whether you have enough space for their accommodation. Your rabbits' shelter should be permanently attached to a large run so they can exercise freely. The shelter itself should be as big as possible but at an absolute minimum L2m x W0.6m x H0.6m, this is so that they can take 3 hops and stretch fully upright. Their full enclosure should be at least L3m x W2m x H1m.



COMPANIONSHIP

Rabbits are extremely sociable animals and can get depressed without social interaction from other bunnies. So when you're thinking about getting rabbits, you should consider whether you would be able to care for two of them at the same time. A healthy male and female, who are already neutered and bonded, make ideal pairs. If you are introducing rabbits to each other for the first time you should introduce them slowly and follow the advice of a vet or rescue centre.

Rabbits should not be kept with other species; they are prey animals so larger animals will be seen as a threat which will cause stress. They also shouldn't be kept with smaller animals, such as guinea pigs, as they are likely to bully them. Rabbits also carry a bacteria which can be harmful to guinea pigs.



BEHAVIOUR

Rabbits need plenty of enrichment to prevent them from getting bored. They love to dig and forage so dig boxes filled with earth, and toys such as willow balls stuffed with hay are a favourite.

As prey animals they also need hiding places and secure platforms, such as a wooden block so that they can check out their surroundings.

They don't enjoy being picked up and handled, and loud noises can cause stress. This is because they are prey animals. Sitting on the floor and allowing them to take a treat from your hand can be a good way of getting them used to being around you.



HEALTH

You should take your rabbits for an annual check-up at the vets, this can be done at the same time as their yearly vaccination appointments. Rabbits need to be vaccinated against

Myxomatosis, Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (RVHD) and RVHD2. You should also regularly check your rabbits at home to make sure that they are eating enough hay and that their teeth, skin and coat are in good condition.

You should also check your rabbits' bottoms to make sure they are clean to help prevent flystrike.

For more information on vaccinations and health checks see our rabbit care guides available on our website www.burgesspetcare.com

GETTING YOUR RABBITS

WHERE SHOULD I GET RABBITS FROM?

There are lots of options available when it comes to obtaining rabbits; including rescue centres, breeders and pet shops. Wherever you decide to get your rabbits from it is important that you do your research to ensure that they have a good reputation and can give you information on the rabbits' sex, care and medical history. They should be willing to answer your questions and will also ask you some questions to ensure that the rabbits are going to a good home.

WHAT SHOULD I ASK WHEN GETTING RABBITS?

Wherever you decide to get your rabbits from, you should ask some questions to ensure that they are healthy and have been well looked after. Here are the main questions to ask:

1. WHAT SEX ARE THEY?

Ensure that what you have been told about their gender is correct, as unexpected litters and accidental pregnancies are the amongst the most common reasons for rabbits ending up in rescues. If you are unsure, speak to a rabbit savvy vet for advice.

2. ARE THEY IN GOOD HEALTH?

Ask for the medical and health history and also check for the below signs that they are healthy:

- ✓ They are alert and inquisitive
- ✓ They have clean bottoms
- ✓ Clean and bright eyes
- ✓ Healthy looking coat
- ✓ Dry and clean nose
- ✓ Nails aren't overgrown
- ✓ Hopping about without any signs of discomfort
- ✓ Head not swaying or tilted

DID YOU KNOW?

It is estimated that around **67,000*** rabbits end up in rescues in the UK every year, so when making the decision to get rabbits always consider rescuing as an option.



3. WHAT IS THEIR DIET?

Check that they have been fed the correct diet consisting of mostly hay and a small amount of single component nuggets. Rabbits that have been fed muesli and limited amounts of hay may be more at risk of health problems so always get advice from a vet.

It is best to continue with the same food that they have already been on to start with and if you would like to change it is advised to transition them gradually over a period of around 28 days to avoid upset stomachs.

4. VACCINATION CARDS

You should ask for proof that they have been vaccinated as well as proof of neutering if this was advertised.



HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

BUDGET SHEET

Creating a budget before you get rabbits is a good idea so that you are prepared for the financial commitment that they will need.

With a pair rabbits costing around £11,000* over their lifetime, it is important to be aware of all the costs involved in owning them so you can decide whether you are able to make the financial commitment throughout their lives.

Use our budget template below to work out the initial outlay required as well as the ongoing costs throughout your rabbit's lifetime. Remember that rabbits need to be kept in at least pairs so the below calculations will need to be doubled to get an accurate cost.



INITIAL COSTS

ITEM	COST
PET CARRIER	
HOUSING	
TOYS/ENRICHMENT	
WATER BOTTLE AND/OR BOWL	
GROOMING KIT	
FOOD BOWL	
HEALTHY TREATS & SUITABLE TOYS	
NEUTERING	

ONGOING COSTS

ITEM	MONTHLY COST	ANNUAL COST
PET INSURANCE		
VACCINATIONS		
HAY		
NUGGETS		
BEDDING		
ENCLOSURE MAINTENANCE		
BOARDING WHEN YOU ARE AWAY		
VET FEES AND MICROCHIPPING		
TOTAL		

ARE RABBITS RIGHT FOR YOU?



RABBIT BREEDS

There is a large variety of rabbit breeds in the UK, but it is important to be aware that just like in cats and dogs, selective breeding for exaggerated features can cause health issues in rabbits. For example, English lops are a popular breed but due to being selectively bred for their long floppy ears they are prone to problems such as ear trauma and infection, and chronic pain. Their rounded head shape can also contribute to dental problems.

Whilst this shouldn't put you off rehoming such breeds from rescue centres, please make sure you do your research and seek advice from a vet on any additional needs they may have.

ARE RABBITS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Caring for rabbits is a big commitment, before making the decision ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have enough space to provide them with the correct environment?
- Can I commit to having at least two rabbits for the next 10 years?
- Do I have enough time to clean them out and check them over every day?
- Will I be able to take them to the vets for their vaccinations and check-ups?
- Can I commit to the initial financial outlay and maintenance costs for their whole lives?
- Do I understand why they are not suitable pets for children?
- Will my other pets accept them and not cause them undue stress?

If you answer 'no' to any of these questions you should not commit to getting rabbits.

If you answered yes to all of the above and want to get some rabbits check out our 'Hopping off on the right foot' guide to help your new rabbits settle in and to get into some good habits.

WANT TO DO SOME MORE RESEARCH?

www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk
www.woodgreen.org.uk
www.rspca.org.uk
www.bluecross.org.uk
www.pdsa.org.uk
www.paag.org.uk



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92% OF VETS RECOMMEND EXCEL*



EXCEL
FEEDING
HAY

1

+

EXCEL
TASTY
NUGGETS

2

+

EXCEL
NATURE
SNACKS

3

+

FRESH
GREENS

4

+

FRESH
WATER

5

THE COMPLETE DIET FOR RABBITS

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