

## When you acquire a pet

*You accept responsibility for the health and welfare of another living thing. You are also responsible for your pet's impact on your family, friends, and community. A pet will be part of your life for many years. Invest the time and effort necessary to make your years together happy ones. When you choose a pet, you are promising to care for it for its entire life. Choose wisely, keep your promise, and enjoy one of life's most rewarding experiences!*

*For more information, visit,*  
American Veterinary Medical Association  
[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians  
[www.aemv.org](http://www.aemv.org)

# Selecting a Rabbit



American Veterinary Medical Association  
1931 North Meacham Road, Suite 100  
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173 - 4360  
Phone: 847.925.8070 • Fax: 847.925.1329  
[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org) • [AVMAinfo@avma.org](mailto:AVMAinfo@avma.org)

*Brought to you by your veterinarian and the  
American Veterinary Medical Association*

*Pets are an important part of the American household. Your pet-owning experience will be most enjoyable if you carefully consider which pet best suits your family, home, and lifestyle. Unrealized expectations are the leading cause of pet relinquishment, so make an informed decision. Take time, involve your family, and give careful consideration to the following questions.*

### **What's special about a rabbit?**

Clean, affectionate, and sociable, rabbits can make excellent house pets. They can be litter trained and are very playful and entertaining. With good care, rabbits kept indoors can live for 5 to 15 years.

### **What choices do you have in a rabbit?**

With more than 60 rabbit breeds in existence, rabbits can vary widely in size and appearance. A common rabbit breed in the United States is the Dutch rabbit which is often black and white or brown and white. Dwarf rabbits tend to be smaller, and the lop variety have ears that hang down instead of being erect.

If you are a first-time owner, acquiring a single rabbit is probably best. If you choose a male (buck) rabbit, you will want to have him neutered to prevent territorial marking with urine. Both male and female rabbits are tame and affectionate when well socialized.

### **What are the special needs of rabbits?**

Rabbits are very popular with children, but they are more delicate and fragile than other pets. Rabbits do not often tolerate being held closely and carried, and may respond by struggling or scratching. They must also be picked up and handled carefully to avoid injury to their backs and legs. Angora rabbits have long hair and require regular grooming.

Rabbits love to chew! Unless you have your eye on your rabbit at all times, do not let it roam freely in your backyard or house. Electric cords, furniture, and ornamental plants are very tempting, dangerous, and expensive chew toys. Therefore, be sure to provide your rabbit with appropriate toys for its well-being. Ask your veterinarian about proper nutrition, handling, and care of your rabbit.



### **Who will care for your rabbit?**

As its owner, you will ultimately be responsible for your rabbit's food, shelter, exercise, physical and mental health for the rest of its life. While families should involve their children in caring for a rabbit, youngsters need the help of an adult who is willing, able, and available to supervise the animal's daily care.

Rabbits are well-known for their ability to produce large numbers of babies. Purchasing and breeding a rabbit for the purpose of allowing children to witness the birth process is not responsible rabbit ownership. If a female rabbit becomes pregnant, it is your responsibility to find good homes for the offspring. Spaying females and neutering males not only prevents reproduction but decreases behavioral problems and health risks.

### **Does a rabbit fit your lifestyle?**

Rabbits are suitable pets in most living situations. They are small, quiet and clean, and can live comfortably in appropriately-sized cages in a house or apartment. Keeping a rabbit outdoors in a hutch may seem more 'natural,' but it can be harmful for the rabbit. An outdoor cage exposes it to weather extremes and predators such as cats, dogs, and foxes. Even if a predator cannot get access to the rabbit, the rabbit could die from the stress of an attempted attack.

Many condominium associations allow their residents to keep rabbits as pets since most no-pet clauses apply only to dogs or cats. However, be sure to consult your association bylaws before you decide to bring a rabbit into your unit.

### **Can you afford a rabbit?**

The initial purchase price of a rabbit is relatively low. However, there will be additional expenses for housing, food, and veterinary care throughout the rabbit's life. Although rabbits are not routinely vaccinated, regular veterinary visits will help keep your rabbit healthy and increase the chances of early detection of disease or other health problems.

### **Where can you get a rabbit?**

Rabbits are available from many sources. Many shelters and rescue organizations care for and find homes for unwanted and abandoned rabbits. You may also purchase rabbits from reliable pet stores and reputable breeders.

### **What should you look for in a healthy rabbit?**

When choosing a rabbit, it is always best to see all the rabbits in the litter, if possible. Each animal should be bright, alert, and active. They should all have shiny, lush fur and be plump and well-fed. If any members of the litter are sickly, do not choose them or an apparently healthy littermate, as that animal may soon also become ill. Both sides of the rabbit should look and feel the same. A rabbit with a dull or rough hair coat or one that is too thin, pot-bellied, or sluggish may be ill.

Make sure your rabbit has had human contact. Rabbits need to be handled and socialized from a young age to be comfortable with people and to make good pets.

### **What must you do to prepare for your rabbit?**

Before bringing your pet home, educate yourself about the care, husbandry, housing, feeding, and socialization needs of rabbits. A proper diet is essential for your rabbit's good health, and providing rabbit pellets alone is not enough to meet the rabbit's nutritional needs. Your pet must have a daily source of fresh greens and good quality hay for roughage. Fresh water and daily exercise are also necessary to keep your rabbit healthy.

Select the proper size cage or hutch for your breed of rabbit. The cage should have enough room for the animal to move around freely. If your rabbit must live outdoors, select a hutch that is at least three feet above the ground, shaded, protected from wind and inclement weather, and covered to keep your pet comfortable and as safe as possible from predators.