



Rabbit adoption – information sheet

Thank you for considering adopting an animal from Marias Animal Shelter. We believe every animal should have a happy, comfortable, and safe home where all their welfare needs are met.

Unfortunately, outdated information and incorrect assumptions surrounding the care of small animals is extremely common, which is why so many animals come to us. We have created this sheet to provide all the relevant information you need to consider before rehoming from us.

When we rehome animals, our goal is to find them the most suitable environment in which they can thrive, not simply survive. We assess each potential adopter and their set up to ensure adopted animals will be taken care of properly to prevent any future issues, for pet or owner.

Why are our standards in place?

Rescue centres are often seen to have high standards that must be met to adopt an animal. These standards may differ from what some people believe to be suitable, however, our standards are in place to ensure that the animals we rehome live happy and healthy lives. We have over 20 years' experience rescuing, rehoming, and caring for small animals. We work closely with vets and rodentologists, constantly updating our knowledge in line with best practice and academic research.

Please note that knowledge and advice on animal care and welfare is constantly changing. The advice and recommendations we provide are carefully researched and reviewed regularly. Staying up to date with the latest information is crucial to providing the best animal care. **Please remember, simply having owned an animal in the past may not necessarily mean you have all the up-to-date information you need for current or future pets.**

Do you adopt to homes with children?

Yes. However, rabbits are not children's pets. An animal is not a child's responsibility; the whole family should be providing a lifetime home. Children can get involved, but the animal should not be for them.

If you do have children, you must ensure that the animal receives thoughtful, calm, and gentle interaction; older children are typically more suitable. Instead of 'cuddling' we recommend supervised interaction at the animal's level for the most positive experience (for human and animal!). Please note, we may ask the age of your children and provide further advice to ensure the welfare of our animals.

Wanting to adopt from us?

1. Read this information sheet carefully!

Please take care to check this information sheet before asking us questions, although we are happy to advise and answer questions, many of the answers can be found on this sheet.

2. Follow the instructions on the bottom of this information sheet. Thank you.

Housing details

Minimum housing requirements: 24hr access to a 12ft x 7ft area for a pair of rabbits.

We are aware that housing can differ in shape or design. We review all housing photographs before adoption and may provide recommendations as necessary so if you are unsure, please get in touch. The most important consideration for us is that your pets have ample space and stimulation.

If you have several smaller enclosures, please consider attaching them together to create one larger permanent area. Likewise, if your pets are housed in a small section of one room, consider allowing them the entire room.

The bigger the enclosure the better! **A hutch is not enough**; hutches were originally designed to store rabbits for a short time period before slaughtering them for food. Unfortunately, hutches have become widely accepted despite being extremely unsuitable for rabbits. Confinement can cause painful skeletal problems, lack of muscle development, contribute to obesity and result in a range of behavioural issues including aggression, boredom, stress, and depression. For these reasons a hutch should never be the main housing and should only be used to offer shelter within a larger area.

Rabbits are crepuscular, meaning they are more active during dawn and dusk. Therefore, along with the reasons stated above, rabbits should not be shut away in a hutch overnight. **They require permanent access to a large enclosure to allow exercise and natural behaviours such as running, jumping, digging, binkying, foraging and more, at any time of day.**



Temporary pens for rabbits to be placed in during the day are typically unsuitable. They do not meet the behavioural needs of rabbits (being crepuscular), are usually too small and do not provide adequate shelter from the elements or protection from predators. Additionally, handling and moving rabbits can be very (and unnecessarily) stressful, and they frequently escape from temporary runs.



Rabbits can live indoors or outdoors, however, they cannot tolerate a sudden temperature change of 10°C or more. Consider any temperature change carefully and acclimatise them gradually. Do not put rabbits outside during the day in winter bringing them inside with heating overnight - leave them in one environment or the other so they can regulate their temperature more easily.

Outdoor housing should be well ventilated, in a naturally lit area and offer shelter from the elements with waterproofed areas. Rabbits should have an enclosed bedded area that's protected from the weather, damp and draughts. Raising housing off the floor slightly can help reduce damp issues. If using a hutch, we recommend single tier, we do accept double tier but remind you to consider the need to change as your rabbit becomes older and arthritic (arthritis can start from 4-5yrs)

If possible, offer choice with some of the enclosure being in the sun and some in the shade. If access to fresh grass is possible, your rabbits will enjoy it! Make sure your enclosure is secure from predators (cats, dogs, birds, rats, stoats etc). We recommend your housing be

fully covered (e.g. with mesh or wood etc) on all exposed sides including the top if possible, while allowing ventilation. **Sheds or wendy houses with a permanent run attached often make fantastic enclosures.**



Don't forget your pets will be exposed to the changing seasons, so bedding and shelter may need to be adjusted accordingly, e.g. provide much more bedding hay in winter that rabbits can snuggle into.

In very cold conditions it is advisable to move accommodation to a more sheltered area such as a naturally lit car-free garage, shed or similar. In hot conditions, ensure the accommodation is not in direct sunlight and provide shade wherever possible using umbrellas, sheets or similar, but do not prevent air flow.

Indoor housing: can consist of a large enclosed area, a rabbit proofed room, free roam of the house or a combination of these. It is essential to rabbit proof your house if they are to have free roam. **House plants and electrical wiring must be out of reach** and any furniture or carpet may be soiled or nibbled! **Rabbits must not be exposed to cooking fumes, perfumes,**



essential oils, aerosols, or similar as these can be toxic.

Being prey animals, please remember that being approached by dogs/cats can be extremely stressful for rabbits. We recommend keeping other animals housed in a separate room. **Do not place rabbits near speakers, TV's, computers or similar as they have very sensitive hearing.**

Housing furniture: make sure to provide lots of hiding places. Rabbits need a minimum of **one separate place to hide per rabbit**, ideally more to allow extra choice. Soft cat/dog beds, cat trees or similar furniture are excellent additions enabling a range of behaviours, and large cardboard boxes (Sellotape and staples removed) make great chewable hiding places. Cereal boxes, paper bags, toilet roll tubes or flowerpots are great for hiding hay or food in, and safe branches e.g., willow, apple, hazel are great for nibbling! Provide a large hay filled litter tray for rabbits as these double as beds and toilets.



Bedding: will vary depending on your enclosure. We recommend vinyl as a base layer as this is cleanable, easily cut to shape and slightly insulating. Bedroom areas or litter trays can then be filled with a newspaper base and hay. **For outdoor enclosures,** we strongly recommend that small gauge wire is buried beneath the ground, or paving slabs placed around the edges to prevent rabbits from digging out or predators digging in.

For indoor/heated environments we recommend a combination of carpet, blankets,

mats, and towels on a solid or vinyl covered floor, with the addition of hay filled litter trays. **If you provide carpet monitor any chewing to make sure it is not being eaten and ingested** by your animal as this can cause serious health issues. **Ensure that rabbits can run comfortably on the floor surface that you provide as some can be very weary on slippery surfaces and may need additional floor coverings.**

Sawdust should never be used as bedding as the fine particles and oils/phenols contained in the wood can irritate internal organs. Commercially sold **wood shavings are also unsuitable** as the dust and fine particles cause respiratory issues. For this reason, we are unable to rehome our animals to an environment where these will be used.

Companionship: Rabbits can live an average of **10-12 years** and they must live in pairs or groups of the same species as they are a social animal. The best pairing is a neutered male and female. We can advise on bonding if needed.

Rabbits must not be housed with guinea pigs, they have very different behaviours and diets, they cannot communicate with each other and rabbits can seriously injure or kill guinea pigs. Rabbits can also pass serious diseases to pigs.

Diet: should be **85% hay/grass, 10% fresh food, and 5% a nugget style dry food.**

We cannot stress how important it is that rabbits have constant access to fresh eating hay.

This is essential to keep teeth and guts healthy. Without hay, rabbits develop serious gut and dental problems including ongoing dental disease and tooth root issues which are expensive to treat and can prove fatal. Without hay rabbits can also develop

Turning rabbit nutrition on its head



potentially fatal gut stasis where their digestive system slows, and immediate veterinary attention is needed.

Rabbits like to eat and poop in the same place so offering hay in litter trays is useful. Alternatively, hay can be offered in bowls or piles around the enclosure where it is clean. Once old or soiled hay is unlikely to be eaten. We do not recommend hay racks as legs and heads can easily become trapped.

Rabbits should not be fed muesli as this encourages selective feeding and can cause obesity and dental disease. A small handful of daily fresh food should include leafy greens, herbs and vegetables. Fruit and root veg should be fed very occasionally as it's high in sugar.

We strongly recommend providing both a water bowl and water bottle;



water bowls are much more natural, accessible, and preferred by most small animals. However, they can become soiled, tip over or empty quickly, hence the need to provide a backup bottle. A non-tip design or ceramic bowl is best.

Health: rabbits require annual vaccinations to protect from **Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic disease (1&2)**. Previously two annual vaccines have been required to cover these three fatal diseases, Nobivac and Filavac. A single combined vaccine is now available at most practices.



Handling: being a prey species the only time rabbits would be picked up in the wild is when they are going to be eaten, so **being handled is very stressful and should be minimised.** Any

loud noises or sudden movements will scare your pet. We strongly recommend interacting with your pet on their level with minimal picking up as your pet will learn to trust you and your interactions will be more positive.

If you do have to pick up your animal it is crucial you support their weight fully, having one hand supporting the rump and the other around the chest. Always minimise the length of handling or stressful events and avoid sneaking up on your pet or chasing them around a large area. Encourage them into a corner or smaller area, lightly cover their face with your hand, then pick up. We must stress that for a happy relaxed animal, handling should be minimised, and rabbits do not typically enjoy being 'cuddled'. They most prefer being stroked on the forehead as this is where they groom each other naturally.

Never use a harness and lead to take small animals for a walk. This is typically highly stressful for a prey animal.

Behaviour: Rabbits are inquisitive, and each has a unique personality. To keep them stimulated provide plenty of toys, tunnels and opportunities to explore. Cardboard boxes, toilet roll tubes and anything similar make great accessories to nibble, hide food in or make beds from. Swapping items in and out or adding new ones keeps up interest and stimulation. Hiding food, forage or herbs among hay is also great for keeping rabbits busy and a dig box provides added behaviour opportunities.

Our Services

Can't find good quality hay? We sell two types of quality palatable eating hay:

Nature's Own 5-a-day hay, £2.50 per 1kg bag.

Sweet Green hay, £5 per 3.5kg bag.

Don't have a carrier? Don't worry, we sell them for £10. Simply enquire with us to arrange.

Worried about nail clipping? We offer a nail trimming service for £10 per animal. Simply

book an appointment and bring your rabbits to the shelter.

Going away? We offer a boarding service! Board your rabbits with us for £10/night per pair, or £8/night for singles. We provide indoor or outdoor pens at a size of 12x7ft. Please enquire with the dates you are looking for to arrange. Rabbits must be up to date with all vaccinations.

Useful Links

Listed below are some useful links, simply click on them to open. Please remember the minimum size we rehome to is 12x7ft.

Housing:

A hutch should never be the only form of housing as stated above. Remember, you may need a single tier shelter with easy accessibility as your rabbits ages due to arthritis.

[Housing ideas & suppliers, The Big Rabbit Hutch](#)
Chartwells hutches provide good shelter areas, they can be found at the following websites (not exhaustive list): [Home and Roost](#); [Scratch and Newton](#); [Rabbit hutch world](#); [Amazon](#).

Care and behaviour:

[Further advice on our website](#)
[Rabbit Welfare Association website - RWAF](#)
[Handling - RWAF](#)
[Bunny behaviour \(and training\) Gwen Bradbury](#)
[RSPCA basic rabbit behaviour explained](#)
[My house rabbit](#)
[Enrichment and toys](#)

Health:

We recommend regular weighing as weight loss can be the first sign of an underlying health issue: [body size/condition chart](#)

Poop can tell you a lot about your rabbit, keep an eye on it daily! [Poop guide](#)

Gut stasis: [RWAF website](#), [Vets Now website](#).

[Health, illness, and disease - RWAF](#)

[Health checking - Pet Plan](#)

[Arthritis - RWAF](#)

Note: if you suspect your rabbit is ill, always seek veterinary attention urgently.

What to do next - adoption instructions



Please note: We charge an adoption fee of £55 per rabbit. Most are neutered (unless health reasons or age has prevented it) and all have been vaccinated and health checked. Vets charge around £75 to neuter and around £50+ for annual vaccinations so adopting from us is often cheaper overall. We are a registered charity, and this fee does not cover our costs. Any additional donation is very gratefully received. Thank you for adopting from us.

Steps to adopt:

Due to Covid-19 restrictions we are unable to conduct our usual home visits, so please read our requirements above carefully.

1. Read this information sheet thoroughly! Please take care to check this information sheet before asking us questions, we are more than happy to advise but most answers can be found on here.
2. Send us a picture of your housing and set up so that we can see the size, design, and contents. Email these pictures to mariasanimalshelter@hotmail.com. Please note that telling us what you intend to provide is not adequate; we must see a picture of your existing set up.
3. We will reply to your email as soon as we have reviewed your housing and set up. Please note that due to the busy demands of our work it may take up to several days for us to respond.
4. We may provide some recommendations or suggest adjustments to your housing before we rehome to you. Please do not think us rude, the only reason we do this is to ensure the best welfare for the animal(s) in question.
5. Visit our website for animals currently available for adoption at www.mariasanimalshelter.com and let us know which individual you are interested in.
6. Arrange a collection appointment with us. We politely ask that your adoption fee of £55 per rabbit is paid prior to collection of your animal(s).

Payment details

We prefer payment via bank transfer if possible.

BACS: Marias Animal Shelter, Lloyds Bank; Sort code: 30-88-22; Account number: 18735760

If this is not possible, we do accept cash payment on collection. We are very grateful for your payment which goes towards the running of the shelter.

Thank you!