Thinking of adding a rabbit (or two!) to your family? Rabbits are the third most popular furry pet after cats and dogs. But with unique care needs and behaviours, they’re definitely not the same as cats or dogs! Before you bring your new companion home, you need to know what to expect from living with rabbits.

Rabbits are a long-term commitment. Are you prepared to feed, clean up after and spend time with your rabbit every day for up to 15 years?

Rabbits should be a part of your family. Your rabbit should be kept in an area of your house where people hang out – ideally in a large, enriched enclosure or with free run of an entire room.

Rabbits behave a lot like wild rabbits. And two things are very important to wild rabbits:

Security. Rabbits are a prey species. In the wild, they either freeze on the spot or run for cover when they’re frightened. As pets, they do the same. To feel secure, your rabbit needs a shelter she can retreat to, whether she’s in her enclosure or out free in a room.

Companionship. In the wild, rabbits live in large groups. They keep watch over each other for predators, eat together and even groom each other. Consider adopting more than one rabbit so they can keep each other company when you’re not home.

Rabbits have unique personalities! Some are shy and will take more time to relax and feel comfortable in your home. But once used to people, rabbits can make fun, affectionate pets.

So remember – commitment, patience and an appreciation for rabbit behaviour are important in becoming life-long friends with your new companion.

An a-bun-dance of rabbit resources!

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Understanding Your Rabbit’s Habits By Tamsin Stone Published by T-Squared
It takes dedication and hard work to be a fantastic rabbit guardian! Here are just some of the care and welfare needs of rabbits. The pet care section of the BC SPCA website – spca.bc.ca – has more rabbit care tips.

Not just carrots
Rabbits are herbivores, meaning they only eat plants. Feed your rabbit plenty of fresh vegetables every day – especially leafy greens like kale, bok choy, parsley and romaine lettuce, alfalfa, and other greens. Your rabbit can also have good quality, high fibre rabbit pellets. Rabbit pellets are a complete, balanced diet. Just don’t feed too many or you’ll end up with an overweight rabbit.

Keep your bunny grounded
Most rabbits don’t like to be picked up. If you do, always use two hands: one under her hind end and the other around her chest. It may be best to have an adult pick your rabbit up for you. Rabbits have strong back legs and can jump quickly. Not only could you get scratched, your rabbit could be seriously injured. Instead of carrying her around, try playing with your rabbit on the floor, and letting her hop on and off your lap as she likes.

Bunny bedding
Habitat bottoms should be solid, not mesh or wire, which can hurt rabbit feet. For bedding, use wood shavings such as aspen (not pine or cedar), carefresh® (bedding made from recycled paper) or a thick, clean blanket. Clean the litter box every other day and the entire cage once a week.

Pile on the hay
Grass hay should be the staple of your rabbit’s diet. Feed him a variety of grass hays such as Timothy hay, orchard grass and oat hay – as much as he wants. Hay helps with digestion. Avoid alfalfa, though. It’s too rich for most rabbits.

Some-bunny to love
Rabbits love company. For all those hours people are at work or school, think how happy your rabbit will be having a rabbit friend around! They’ll eat, play and sleep together, and groom each other.

Are you ready to hop to it?
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What's up, Doc?
Spending time with your rabbit will show you how she normally looks and behaves. When you notice something unusual – like diarrhea or loss of appetite – you’ll know to take her to the veterinarian right away! Rabbits also need vaccines to protect them from disease.

Playtime!
Rabbits require plenty of exercise to stay healthy – at least four hours each day outside of a cage! You can let your rabbit hop around your house or inside a large fenced-in area safe from other animals. Be sure to “rabbit-proof” your home by covering electrical cords and moving household plants out of reach. When the weather is nice, you can also take your rabbit outside for some supervised playtime inside a pen.

Prevent bunny boredom
Keep your rabbit entertained with puzzle feeders and toys such as paper bags, cat toys and hard plastic baby toys. To wear down her constantly growing teeth, give her things to chew on like grass mats and untreated willow or apple tree branches.

The scoop on litter box training
Rabbits can be trained to use a litter box so they won’t make a mess in the house. A large plastic cat litter box works well, as long as your rabbit can fit completely inside. Make sure your rabbit has one in his cage, and at least one to use during playtime. Keep the litter box topped with fresh Timothy hay to encourage him to use it.

Condos for “cottontails”
Rabbits are best kept indoors as part of your family. Your rabbit’s habitat must be big enough to fit at least three full hops from end to end. The more space, the better!
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**Not just carrots**

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**1 + 1 = 144?**

When it comes to rabbits, this math is right on the nose! In just one year, a female rabbit could have as many as 144 baby bunnies! To help prevent pet overpopulation, all BC SPCA rabbits are spayed or neutered. Yours should be too! Spaying and neutering can make litter box training easier and keep your companion healthier.

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**Hare salon**

Rabbits are great groomers, so they don’t need baths. But they do need brushing – especially long-haired rabbits – to prevent matting. Rabbits need their nails trimmed every four to six weeks by an adult. Cutting nails too short can be painful and cause them to bleed.

**Condos for “cottontails”**

Rabbits are best kept indoors as part of your family. Your rabbit’s habitat must be big enough to fit food and water bowls, a litter box and a shelter for resting and hiding – while still allowing him to take at least three full hops from end to end. The more space, the better!

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Rabbits

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