

# Mustang Alley Farm

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## HOLLAND LOP CARE SHEET

We've compiled a reference sheet to help provide your bunny with proper care, a comfortable environment, and responsible attention to the animal's health. Proper nutrition consists of quality professional hay-based pelleted feed, suitable free-choice hay, and fresh water available at all times. Never allow a rabbit to roam freely without proper fencing or supervision. We strongly recommend getting your bunny micro-chipped to facilitate his/her return if lost or stolen. This list is not fully exhaustive or complete, but it should cover the most important concerns and basic rabbit care topics. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any other questions, because we love our animals deeply and want to help your new furbaby have the best life possible!

### HAY

- \* Unlimited hay should be provided for your rabbit at all times and should make up at least 80% of their diet.
- \* The high fiber content in hay is essential and the single **most important** thing in maintaining optimum intestinal and dental health in all rabbits. Without this crucial fiber, a rabbit's digestive system will not function properly. The movement of food through the gut will slow down, causing all manner of illnesses and, more often than not, can lead to an early death.
- \* The tough fiber structure of hay is also essential for the dental health of rabbits. Rabbit's teeth grow all the time, and need to chew on coarse substances to keep them from becoming painfully long. If teeth get too long, it will inhibit the rabbit's ability to eat, swallow, and groom themselves-- all of which are essential functions for their species.
- \* Alfalfa (lucerne) is very high in protein and calcium, and is recommended for young rabbits (and lactating does). Alfalfa is actually neither hay nor grass-- it is a legume and is grown as a richer type of animal feed. It is very good for growing youngsters for helping them put on weight. It is also good for helping a post-op, sick, or underweight rabbit, as it is a very good source of rich proteins needed to boost their immune system. Alfalfa can be too fattening as the main ingredient for adult rabbits, so rabbits over 7 months should be gradually switched to Timothy hay.
- \* You can add forage blends on top to encourage more hay intake, such as: dandelion leaves, blackberry leaves & berries, carrot top greens, kale, baby spinach, etc. You can even add fresh grass, which is more nutritious than hay (as hay is dried, it loses some of the beneficial vitamins & minerals).
- \* Popular types of rabbit hay include Alfalfa, Meadow, Timothy, and Orchard grass. Any of these hays will provide a suitable foundation for your rabbit's diet, but don't feel like you have to be limited to one type-- Mix it up! Mixing several different kinds of hay will give your rabbits a wider variety of flavors, making it more appealing and will encourage more intake of hay. Blending hay will also create a balanced mix of nutritional content too, as some varieties have more vitamins / minerals than others.
- \* Compare/contrast different types of hay here: <http://www.petkeen.com/types-of-hay-for-rabbits>

### PELLETS

- \* Young rabbits should be fed unlimited commercial Alfalfa-based pellets. Alfalfa is higher in calories and lower in fiber than Timothy-based pellets and is necessary for proper growth, along with the added protein and calcium it provides.
- \* Once a rabbit is 7 months, it can gradually be switched to a Timothy-based variety and provided 1/8 cup - 1/4 cup of pellets daily.

### FRUITS / VEGGIES

- \* Rabbits need fresh foods in their diet every day-- about 1.5 cups per 2 lbs of body weight, but it's best to wait until a rabbit is at least 3 months old (12 weeks) -- strictly free-choice hay, unlimited alfalfa-based pellets, and water until this age. New foods need to be introduced slowly so your rabbit's gut bacteria can adapt to processing the new food. It's a good idea to introduce one type of food at a time. If your rabbit is sensitive to one type, it will be easy to identify and avoid in future.
- \* Keep an eye on your rabbit's droppings-- changes in these are generally the first sign that you may be going a little fast, or that particular food doesn't agree with them. The most common problem is excess cecotropes. They are soft and can end up sticking to the fur or squished on the floor. This can usually be resolved by cutting out fresh foods and reducing dry food for a couple of days, so your rabbit eats plenty of hay.
- \* If your rabbit stops producing droppings, refuses food or has watery droppings seek immediate veterinary advice. Young rabbits are very fragile and can become very sick in a matter of hours.
- \* Leafy greens (except iceberg lettuce) are best for rabbits: dandelion leaves, carrot tops, kale, spinach, spring greens, raspberry/blackberry leaves and herbs such as parsley and basil. **A good rule of thumb = the darker green in color, the better.**
- \* For young rabbits first introduction to greens, it's best to avoid fruits (too high in sugar), though these can be introduced as treats later.

## LEAFY GREENS (75% of the fresh portion)

- Parsley
- Spinach
- Swiss Chard
- Carrot Tops
- Red/Green Lettuce
- Basil
- Cilantro
- Fennel
- Romaine Lettuce
- Mustard Greens
- Arugula
- Kale
- Dandelion Greens
- Raspberry / Blackberry Leaves
- Bok Choy
- Mint Leaves

## NON-LEAFY GREENS (15% of the fresh portion)

- Carrots
- Broccoli (leaves & stems)
- Celery
- Cabbage
- Zucchini
- Bell Peppers (any color)
- Edible flowers (roses, pansies, hibiscus)
- Broccolini
- Brussel Sprouts
- Summer Squash

## FRUIT (10% of the fresh portion – leave nutritious skin on, unless stated otherwise)

- Apple (without stem & seeds)
- Peach
- Kiwi
- Papaya
- Pineapple (remove skin)
- Melons
- Nectarine
- Pear
- Plum (without pits)
- Mango
- Berries (uncooked)
- Banana (remove peel)
- Apricot
- Orange

## WATER

- \* Rabbits drink as much water daily as a medium-sized dog and MUST have access to fresh water at all times!
- \* We use water dishes for our rabbits as it is more natural and allows them to get more water at a time.
- \* You are welcome to switch them to a bottle, but make sure they have some kind of dish for the first week to give them time to get the hang of it.

## LITTER TRAINING

- \* We start all of our young rabbits on litter-box training, but it will take a few weeks/months for them to master it (just think of it like they're in the "toddler phase" of potty-training until about 3-4 months old).
- \* Rabbits have a natural inclination to poop and pee in one area. Take advantage of this by setting up a cat litter box or shallow storage bin for them to sit in by their hay feeder (since they spend a large portion of their day eating hay).
- \* Put a thin layer of rabbit-safe wood shavings or pellets at the bottom of the litter box. Then put hay on top of the litter. Do not use clay/clumping cat litter, as they are not safe for rabbits.
- \* Rabbits like to eat and poop at the same time, so getting them used to pooping in the same area will encourage good litter box habits.
- \* Any poops you sweep up should be put in their litter box, and praise them when you catch them using the bathroom there to reinforce good behavior.

## SPAY / NEUTER

- \* Rabbits, by nature, are very social creatures and should not be kept on their own (unless you can dedicate lots of interaction with them daily). Lonely rabbits can get very depressed, acquire destructive behavior to entertain themselves, and isolated rabbits can get stressed out to the point where they stop eating. Male-female pairings work best to create a mutually loving companionship.
- \* We recommend getting your bunnies spayed or neutered around 6-8 months old-- the obvious benefit is to prevent any unwanted pregnancies. Although raising baby rabbits might seem like a wonderful family experience, finding homes for the babies may prove more challenging than you might anticipate.
- \* Spaying/neutering can help eliminate the risk of reproductive cancer. This is relatively common in rabbits, although more frequent in female rabbits.
- \* Neutered males are much less likely to display undesirable hormone-induced behaviors, such as mounting, territorial marking (urine spraying), and aggression. Female rabbits are strongly influenced by their hormones and can become very territorial and aggressive.
- \* Litter box habits are much more stable in spayed/neutered rabbits.
- \* Your rabbit may be calmer and easier to handle once they are fixed, as they will not be experiencing the stresses of sexual frustration.
- \* Most veterinarians recommend spaying/neutering around 6-8 months old to allow for proper bone growth.

## BATHING

\* Do not bathe them! Use damp washcloths or pet-safe wipes if absolutely necessary-- Rabbits are great at cleaning & grooming themselves, just like cats. They are at risk of shock, injury, and hypothermia (even when hot outside) if given baths.

## NAILS

\* Nails should be clipped at least once a month (cat clippers work best), unless the bunny has a "scratch pad" to naturally wear down their nails.

## INTRODUCING OTHER PETS

\* Rabbits can get along great with pets of other species in the home, but please understand they are prey by nature... and cats & dogs are predators at the top of the food chain. This means the introduction may take more time than anticipated and there are no guarantees that it will work.

\* Certain dog breeds are "hard wired" with a high prey drive (Rhodesian Ridgebacks, Greyhounds, Irish Wolfhounds, etc) and it is in their nature to chase/attack small animals.

\* If your pet doesn't already respond extremely well to vocal commands ("leave it!", "back away!", or "NO!"), then please achieve basic obedience before attempting an introduction. It is in your best interest, as well as your bunny's, for this behavior to be solid & mastered.

### 1. Find a Neutral Space:

Locate a space in your home that is not frequently used/occupied by either animal. It should be a space in which you can control the interaction as well. This will reduce or eliminate any territorial behavior.

### 2. Secure the Rabbit in Safe Enclosure:

Place the rabbit in a crate before bringing it to the neutral space. Allow the rabbit to acclimate there for ½ hour or more before you introduce the other pet into the space. If the rabbit is showing signs of stress, postpone the introduction process until another day. Signs include biting the crate bars, overgrooming, displaying altered feeding or toileting behavior or repeatedly circling the enclosure.

### 3. Secure the Dog or Cat:

Secure the other pet with a leash attached to its collar or to a front-clipping harness before entering the introduction space.

### 4. Ask for Help:

Ask a family member or friend to help by holding your dog/cat. You want the most supervision possible and having an extra set of hands and eyes will work to your advantage.

### 5. Introduce Them Slowly:

Do not introduce the animals hastily. The rabbit will have been placed in its cage in the neutral space ahead of time. Bring the dog/cat into the space slowly and allow them to investigate the rabbit in its crate – visually and through smell. Don't make sudden movements or allow them access to one another too quickly.

### 6. Introduction Without Solid Barriers:

Considerable caution should be used before attempting this, as things can go back in the blink of an eye. The dog/cat must be tightly secured & kept from freely interacting with the rabbit on its own. This setup is more for the freedom of the rabbit to have the choice of interacting with the other pet, but still able to move away.

- Once again, watch the rabbit for signs of stress or distress. If the rabbit is kicking, breathing hard, or trying to escape, then remove the other pet from the room and let the rabbit calm down. Keep in mind that, if the rabbit stops moving altogether, is hunkered down and "frozen", this may also indicate a reluctance to interact.

- By the same token, make sure the dog/cat is not stressed or even over-excited. If you observe either of these behaviors, postpone the introduction until pets are in a calmer state.

### 7. Keep an Eye on Them:

Under no circumstances are the animals allowed to be left together without supervision until there is no question as to whether one might be able to harm, scare or cause undue stress to the other.

### 8. Keep Sessions Short:

Don't push your luck by allowing the introduction period to get too long. Keep the introduction sessions short... no more than 10 minutes. Longer exposure to one another will increase the potential for the dog/cat to get too excited or the rabbit to begin getting stressed out.

### 9. Practice the Routine:

Your pets may not hit it off right away, and that's okay. Practice introducing your pets to each other until it becomes a routine. Eventually, your pets will get used to seeing and smelling each other. The dog/cat must understand the rabbit is "part of the pack" and not an intruding rodent that must be eliminated.

### 10. Separate Feeding Areas:

It is best to separate your pets during meal times or whenever food is around. Heightened stress levels or over-excitement can be distracting, intrusive or stressful and may create negative associations.

## **INTRODUCTION TO A RESIDENT BUNNY**

- \* Follow the basic steps above when introducing a new bunny to your resident bunny as well. Introductions work best in neutral territory, such as a place neither rabbit has claimed as their own. Outside in a secure enclosure also works because their fear can actually draw them closer together like the old "safety in numbers" type of mentality (also called Stress Bonding).
- \* Humping is okay (it's actually part of the introduction process) and is a necessary step for them to form a lifelong bond.
- \* Real fighting, however, should never be allowed and must be broken up. You will know it is a real fight when the 2 buns become 1 blurry ball of fluff, rolling & twisting together soooo lightning fast!
- \* When we introduce our rabbits together, they will attempt to mount each other for the first few days until their mini hierarchy has been established. Usually the resident female bun will be dominant and will hump as a way to say "Hey I was here first, so pay attention & follow my lead." And this is usually how it remains-- if she (or whichever rabbit is dominant) is calm, then so are the other buns... if she is on high-alert, then they follow suit according to her body language.

## **BONDING WITH YOUR BUNNY**

- \* A rabbit may start out as shy, afraid, very independent, or hesitant to trust you. It takes deliberate action on your part to build trust and mutual understanding with these sensitive, intelligent prey animals.
- \* **First and foremost: get on your rabbit's level** — compared to a human, rabbits are small. Most of the time it's our feet and legs in their field of view. It's hard to build a connection with a pair of legs-- so you've got to get on the same level. Sit or lie down on the floor. If the floor won't work for you bring the rabbit up on the sofa or bed with you.
- \* **Be Patient, don't rush.** Our bunnies are used to dogs, cats, chickens, ducks, goats, sheep, mini donkeys and horses outside-- as well as inside noises like vacuums, pianos, phones ringing and human voices. This exposure desensitizes their "skittish" instincts & helps each bunny master important coping skills. Overcoming harmless fears from a young age, in turn, reduces stress & anxiety levels throughout the rabbit's entire lifetime-- but it can still take a while for your rabbit to adjust to their new home, new people, new scents, etc.
- \* **Speak softly.** Those big ears are good at conveying sound! Rabbits seem to enjoy listening to humans, as long as your voice is gentle and soft.
- \* **Give a few small treats** as you are getting to know each other. Eating is a social activity for rabbits and eating together builds trust. Small portions of carrot, apple, herbs, or oats are offerings a rabbit will appreciate.
- \* **Hold your rabbit properly.** And bear in mind that rabbits generally dislike being held. Rabbits are ground-dwelling animals who naturally fear being lifted from the ground by predators. Lifting and holding should be kept to a minimum. Although they don't like to be picked up, most rabbits do desire physical affection. Most find petting, snuggling, nuzzling, and sitting companionably beside each other pleasurable activities.
- \* **Play with toys together.** Most rabbits are playful, and some games are great for two. Stacking cups, plastic baby keys, and wooden blocks are fun for tossing and knocking over.
- \* **Offer new enrichment regularly.** Rabbits LOVE cardboard boxes and cat tunnels! I try to give the rabbits a new large box, a bundle of pine cones, or empty toilet-paper rolls every week. They appreciate new things to check out, which will keep them happy & entertained for hours!
- \* **Let your rabbit come to you.** Rabbits are naturally curious. If you are quiet and patient, he/she will come over and inspect you. Resist the urge to pet them right away-- let them explore you first, and learn that you are not a threat. I spend time daily on the floor bonding with a new bunny (30 minutes minimum) and encourage others to try it. I lay down on my stomach or side (this is also how bunnies lay when they're content) with my phone / watch TV / pretend to sleep / etc -- and completely IGNORE the rabbits for a while. I don't pet them, look at them, or talk to them for the first 5-10 minutes (I know-- this is the hardest part!). I just give them time to check me out and assess the situation at their own pace. Some take longer than others, but they soon realize I'm not a threat. They'll actually view my larger size difference as a comfort, and feel safe tucked up next to me. Before long, they'll start running & jumping all over me, and most of the time fall asleep on my back. :)