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## Caring For Your Rabbit

### ***Nutrition;***

The two primary keys to rabbit nutrition are providing plenty of fibre, primarily in the form of hay, and being consistent in what you feed.

Rabbits need access to hay all of the time. 75% of their diet should be good quality grass hay as they are grazing animals like horses. Grass hay (like timothy) is better than legume hay (lucerne) for most rabbits, except for young bunnies under 6 months or those with weak bones from age or surgery. Grinding fibrous hay all day keeps their constantly growing teeth worn down to avoid expensive dental problems and prevent boredom.

Rabbits are not designed to eat grains, nuts, seeds and corn. Rabbits cannot digest the starch and can cause obesity. Mixes are not recommended as they let animals selective feed (that is pick out the bits they like and leave the healthy stuff behind). Rabbit pellets contain consistent amounts of protein and fibre and can be fed roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup per 1kg body weight.

Consistency is important to keep their gut bacterial population healthy. Any vegetable supplements should be the same every day so the microbes stay in balance. Introduce greens one at a time to make sure they agree with your rabbit's digestive tract. Approximately 1 cup vegetables per 1.8 kg of body weight daily are appropriate for most rabbits. Some suggestions include: Cos lettuce, Butter crunch, red leaf lettuce, coriander, parsley, carrot tops, dandelion greens and kale. Carrots should only be given in small amounts as they have a lot of sugar, and broccoli and cauliflower should be avoided as they cause gas!

Many owners want to offer treats to their rabbits. A treat should be enjoyable to eat and provide interaction between you and your pet. When fed in limited quantities, herbs (fresh or dried) or fruits can be offered as treats. Pieces of banana or apple are favorites with rabbits. Again, in order to prevent gastrointestinal upset, it is best to feed the same treats consistently.

### ***Housing;***

Bunnies can be kept inside and are easily litter box trained. Just make sure power cords, pots plants, etc are bunny-proof. Outside rabbits should be protected from predators like dogs and summer heat.

### ***Preventative Health Care;***

Desexing bunnies not only prevents breeding but can minimize other unwanted behaviours and reduce risk of illness. Vaccination is available for Calicivirus – a deadly illness present in the Australian environment. Myxomatosis is another deadly disease spread by biting insects. There is no vaccine available here so the best solution is to use netting on their hutch to stop mosquitoes.

