

HOUSE RABBIT TOYS

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Why Are Toys Important?

Toys are important because they provide:

- 🐾 **Mental stimulation.** Without challenging activities to occupy your rabbit when you're not home, your rabbit, especially a solitary rabbit, will get bored. This could lead to depression and/or excessive destruction. The creative use of toys can extend your rabbit's life by keeping him interested in his surroundings, giving him the freedom to interact with those surroundings and allowing him to constantly learn and grow.
- 🐾 **Physical exercise.** Your rabbit needs safe activities to keep her body in shape, as well as her mind. She needs things to climb on, crawl under, hop on and around, dig into and chew on. Without outlets for these physical needs, your rabbit may become fat or depressed, or even create jumping, chewing or crawling diversions with your furniture.
- 🐾 **Bunny proofing for your home.** Toys are not just for your rabbit; they also keep your house safe. By providing your rabbit with a selection of toys chosen to meet her age, sex, reproductive status and temperament, you have fulfilled most of the requirements of bunny proofing your home.

How to Choose Toys

If you've ever bought a new toy for your cat, and, after removing the wrapping (and price tag!) found that Sweet Pea would rather pee on than play with her new ball, tunnel, mouse or fishing pole, you know the frustration of having your toy rejected. Because all rabbits are different, all will not like the same kinds of toys, and some rabbits will use a toy differently than others. Rabbit toys can be extremely elaborate or very simple and can cost anywhere from nothing to hundreds of dollars. Luckily, rabbits don't care whether you spend your daughter's tuition fund on their toys or if you build them yourself out of discarded wood, cardboard and paper. Your rabbit will tell you what her own toy needs are.

Does he like to hide in the stuffing under the recliner? Does she like to climb on top of the desk and poke around the printer? Does she dig furiously in the corner of the carpet? Does he run up and down the stairs with abandon? Have you ever noticed that the minute you let him out of the cage in the morning, he races to the refrigerator or the couch to continue the redecorating job he left off yesterday? The House Rabbit Society points out that many rabbits are project-oriented and are only interested in an activity if it is going to occupy their mind and body for quite some time. It must be very satisfying for a bunny to finally complete a major architectural or interior-decorating job with which he has been occupied for a period of days or weeks. All of these behaviors warrant different kinds of toys.

Providing a lot of toys to an untrained or young rabbit doesn't mean that you can leave him loose for eight hours and come home to an intact apartment. Don't give too much freedom too soon. Work with your rabbit and his personal tendencies, to set up a schedule of freedom that suits both of you. As he gets older, and after he's been neutered, he won't need as much discipline and he can be left out alone for longer periods of time, but don't rush it!

Toys and Temperaments

Here are some ideas based on types of activity. These are natural behaviors that need an outlet. By providing safe, non-destructive opportunities, you ensure that the rabbit will not be forced to improvise.

Burrowing

Rabbits are tunneling animals, and most enjoy digging tunnels or digging at the end of pre-made tunnels. You can get cardboard concrete forms from building suppliers or contractor friends, which make great, inexpensive, chewable tunnels. You can also stuff newspaper into one end of the tunnel, providing lots of digging opportunities. For rabbits who like to lie in, rather than dig in, a tunnel, you can buy cat tunnels made of nylon and synthetic sheepskin. These are extremely comfy and tend to be very popular. You can give your bun a long, narrow cardboard box, open at either ends, or, just open at one. You can create a tunnel by setting up a running space between your couch and your wall, just big enough for bun.

Digging

Along with tunneling goes digging. Some rabbits enjoy digging at the end of a tunnel; others will dig wherever they can. World-class diggers need lots of opportunities to dig, and fortunately, these are easy to provide. A cardboard box, large litterbox or dishpan, or even a large wicker basket filled with hay, shredded newspapers, old magazines or junk mail, and any other safe shreddable, should do the trick. If there is a particular spot on the carpet that your rabbit likes to dig, you can cover it with furniture, a carpet scrap or piece of grass mat, but make sure to provide a digging box as well. To keep bun's nails trim, consider purchasing medium-grit sandpaper and using non-toxic glue, affix it to a heavy, thick piece of cardboard - as bun digs, bun keeps her nails filed.

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Shredding

Does Zippy peel the wallpaper or sheetrock? Rabbits who like to shred need to have paper products aplenty. An urban Yellow Pages is one of the best shredding choices. Unless your rabbit eats a great deal of the paper, shredding itself is not harmful, except to your house and possessions. You can give him the Yellow Pages on their own or in a box or basket with other shreddable items. Like many rabbit activities, shredding is not particularly neat, so keeping the shreddables in a box may keep your home a bit neater. A whisk broom or full size broom made of straw, not plastic also provides a fun shredding toy.

Throwing

All kinds of rabbits, from aggressive to mellow, like to throw things. Baby toys, keys, batta balls and Slinkys are all throwable alternatives to the food dish or litterbox. Make sure the toys are made of hard plastic or metal and have no edible parts. Some rabbits will even play toss with you, if you start the game.

Climbing

Outgoing, rambunctious rabbits like to climb furniture, challenging the general statement that rabbits are happiest on the ground. Like mountain climbers, they enjoy both the thrill of the climb and the view from the top. Set up a series of boxes that are stabilized at the bottom, so that your rabbit can safely climb from level to level. Some commercial cat trees are great for rabbits as well, as they provide perches at the top of each level. You can use ramps to help your little explorer get onto the tops of things (his cage, for example, covered with a rug), or you can use a ramp and perch combination as an end in itself. And you can easily build a little condo out of wood or (for temporary use until it's destroyed) cardboard with holes in the side for lookouts, ramps connecting the floors and a "sundeck" on top to view the world.

Chewing

This behavior is perhaps the central concern of most bunny caretakers. Rabbits need to chew, both for physical and psychological reasons. Wicker baskets, non-poisonous logs and sticks, cardboard, paper, straw and pine cones are all good choices. If your bun enjoys chewing holes into the back of the couch, give her a closed cardboard box filled with paper or straw, with a small hole in it to start, and let her finish the job. Be imaginative! Provide a toy box of untreated wicker or cardboard full of different sizes and shapes and textures of wood, dried-out pine cones, cardboard tubes or other safe items.

Do not give just a chew stick! People often buy these strange orange-and-green wooden sticks from the pet supply store for their new rabbit, and are surprised to see that Thumper barely sniffs his before starting in on the baseboards. Especially for a young rabbit or a particularly chew-conscious rabbit, chew toys need to be interesting, which a chew stick is not, even if it's dyed orange and shaped like a carrot, and plentiful. The more toys and the greater variety, the better. A rabbit that has only a stick, a log or a piece of two-by-four to chew on, is going to be a bored rabbit. And a bored rabbit is usually a naughty rabbit.

Bunching

Some rabbits like to "organize" rugs, bedding, pillows or towels. If your rabbit spends a lot of time on the bed, pushing, pulling and biting the sheets and blankets until they're just right, he will probably enjoy his own towel to bunch around on the floor. This could be an old hand towel, preferably with low nubs, or it could be more extravagant, such as a pillow or two. Make sure that he's not actually eating the towel, which would be dangerous, and is just biting, pushing, bunching and pulling it.

Hitting

Aggressive rabbits who lunge, growl, threaten, snort and box often enjoy having toys on which they can take out their aggressions. Anything that is partially immobile, yet is flexible enough to move when hit, is fun. Hanging parrot toys (don't get the small bird toys, like those made for cockatiels, because the plastic can be easily chewed apart), hanging baby toys (a mobile is the best!) or a plastic rainbow Slinky hung on the top of the cage, all provide a high-energy rabbit with a suitable outlet for her emotions.

Rolling, nudging

Some rabbits like to play with balls. Large, rubber balls work the best - the ones that you find in large baskets at drug/discount stores. Never give a balloon or rubber ball small enough to swallow to any pet of any kind. When it comes to toys, always give too much, not too little. Observing your rabbit's preferred activities and devising toys that will engage him, can be a mutually enjoyable experience, a game within a game.

Checklist of Bunny Toys

If you find your rabbit ingesting plastic or cardboard toys, switch to a different type of toy that the rabbit is not interested in eating.

Some good toys to start with:

- 🐾 Handleless paper bags and cardboard boxes for crawling inside, scratching and chewing. Bunnies like them much more when there are at least two entry points into the boxes. See additional toy handout, "How to Build a Bunny Box" by Chris Rosenzweig.
- 🐾 Cardboard concrete forms for burrowing.
- 🐾 Cardboard roll from paper towels or toilet paper.
- 🐾 Untreated wicker baskets or boxes full of shredded paper, junk mail, magazines, straw or other organic materials for digging.
- 🐾 Yellow Pages for shredding.
- 🐾 Cat toys, such as Batta balls and other cat toys that roll or can be tossed.
- 🐾 Parrot toys that can be tossed or hung from the top of the cage and chewed or hit.

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- 🐾 Baby toys, such as hard plastic (not teething) toys like rattles and keys, or things that can be tossed.
- 🐾 Children or birds' mobiles for hitting.
- 🐾 "Lazy cat lodge" which is a cardboard box with ramps and windows, to climb in and chew on. Also, kitty condos, tubes, tunnels and trees work well.
- 🐾 Nudge and roll toys like large rubber balls, empty Quaker Oat boxes and small tins.
- 🐾 "Busy Bunny" toys found at <http://www.busybunny.com/home.htm>.
- 🐾 Plastic rainbow Slinky.
- 🐾 Toys with ramps and lookouts for climbing and viewing the world.
- 🐾 Dried out pine cones.
- 🐾 Jungle gym-type toys from Toys'R'Us.
- 🐾 A (straw) whisk broom.
- 🐾 A hand towel for bunching and scooting.
- 🐾 Untreated wood, twigs and logs that have been aged for at least three months. Apple tree branches can be eaten fresh off the tree. Stay away from cherry, peach, apricot, plum and redwood, which are all poisonous.
- 🐾 Untreated sea grass or maize mats from Pier One or Cost Plus.
- 🐾 Things to jump up on in order to watch the world from up high. Rabbits like to be in high places, especially to watch out the window.
- 🐾 Colorful, hard plastic caps from laundry detergent and softener bottles. They have great edges for picking up with their teeth, make a nice "ponk" sound when they collide and the grip ridges molded into the plastic make a neat "ratchety" sound when rabbits dig at the cap. The caps are nice for human-stacks-on-floor and bun-knocks-down kind of games too.

Note: Be sure not to choose caps from caustic or hazardous material bottles, like drain cleaners and bathroom cleaner bottles, since a residue of the cleaner might remain no matter how much washing you do.

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