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Litter Training Your Rabbit

Over the past few years an increasing number of people have moved away from the traditional idea of keeping a rabbit in the hutch by bringing it into the home. When considering a 'house rabbit' the most frequently asked question is 'but won't it use the whole house as a toilet?' Much to the surprise of some people rabbits can be easily trained to use a litter tray.

- The prospective house rabbit should be obtained as young as possible, preferably when 8 weeks old. This is not only likely to speed up the learning process but is imperative so that the rabbit can be well socialized and conditioned to the general household.
- Once at home the rabbit should be confined in a suitably small area, for a period of 48 hours. The area can be a small room but it's wiser to obtain one of the indoor cages.
- Provide food, water and toys. Cover the floor area with bedding such as newspaper, wood flakes or straw. By this method the rabbit will gain security in one environment whilst it encounters new stimuli as well as providing an opportunity to choose a particular corner as a toilet. Once this has been achieved a tray can be filled with non-clumping cat litter or wood shavings and placed in this area.
- To speed up the training some of the original soiled bedding can be placed into the tray. Again it is then advisable to leave the rabbit confined for a further 24 hours.
- The rabbit's natural action of eating whilst depositing can be used to encourage the use of the tray by placing a hayrack or food bowl at the tray end.
- The litter tray should be cleaned out regularly but not so often that the scent of urine/faeces do not remain long enough to allow the association to develop. A thorough clean out is advisable every 36 hours – any longer and it could force the rabbit to seek another location.

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Problems that can arise

A perfectly trained house rabbit can start to deposit faeces and urine in locations other than the tray as he or she reaches puberty. At this time, owners will describe how their rabbit runs in circles around their legs, possibly grunting and depositing faeces. On occasion a spray of urine may follow this. Neutering is an effective means of reducing this behaviour, if not removing it all together.

They can also start to urinate in inappropriate locations. Once the association has been formed it is very hard to break. The rabbit needs to be confined into the minimal area with it's food, water, toys and tray again for approximately 48 hours. Whilst it is being implemented the targeted areas must be cleaned thoroughly. A suitable cleaner must be bought as it is a common mistake that the stain has been removed. However products remove the smell to humans but not to the rabbit. At the end of the 48 hours the rabbit can then be allowed increased freedom with constant supervision. If the area that had been urinated on was the sofa, it should be given a firm command (such as 'OFF'), removed and then given a small food reward and/or a vocal praise.

Whenever slip-ups occur, whether in toilet training, during puberty or an undetermined reason later in life, punishment is never the answer.

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