

RABBIT MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

MYTH: RABBITS ARE LOW MAINTENANCE

THE TRUTH IS: They may not need walked like dogs do, but they are definitely not low maintenance! Their living quarters need to be cleaned daily. They need fresh food and water every day, including a fresh salad of washed dark green leafy vegetables. Regular veterinary care starting with spay or neuter is a must. Certain rabbit health problems become chronic and require regular (and sometimes expensive) veterinary treatment. To complicate the matter, veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine are not easy to find.

MYTH: RABBITS ONLY LIVE A YEAR OR TWO

THE TRUTH IS: A well cared for indoor rabbit can live 7-10 years, and some live into their teens. This is similar to some breeds of dogs, and they require the same long-term commitment.

MYTH: RABBITS DON'T NEED VETERINARY CARE THE WAY DOGS AND CATS DO

THE TRUTH IS: Although Rabbits do not need regular vaccinations they do require regular veterinary checkups to detect small problems before they become big problems. Companion rabbits all need to be spayed/neutered by a veterinarian experienced in rabbit surgery. This is necessary to reduce the hormone-driven behaviors such as lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing. It also protects the females from the risk of uterine cancer, the risk of which grows by 50% as rabbits grow older.

MYTH: RABBITS ARE HAPPY OUTDOORS IN A BACKYARD HUTCH

THE TRUTH IS: If they are kept outdoors in a hutch they are often forgotten and neglected once the novelty wears off. Frequently they are relegated to a life of solitary confinement and suffer the extremes of weather, as well as diseases spread by fleas, ticks, flies and mosquitoes. They can die of heart attacks from the very approach of a predator—even if the rabbit is not bitten. Rabbits are social animals and enjoy social contact with their human care-takers. The easiest way to provide social stimulation for a companion rabbit is to have him live indoors as a member of the family.

MYTH: RABBITS ARE DIRTY AND HAVE A STRONG ODOR

THE TRUTH IS: Rabbits are immaculately clean, and once they have matured and are spayed/neutered they will not soil their living quarters. They will readily use a litter box, and if the box is cleaned or changed regularly, there is no offensive odor.

MYTH: RABBITS LOVE TO BE PICKED UP AND CUDDLED

THE TRUTH IS: Some rabbits tolerate being handled, while many more do not like to be picked up and carried. If rabbits are mishandled they will learn to nip to protect themselves. If they feel insecure when carried they may scratch to get down. If they are unspayed/unneutered they will exhibit territorial behavior such as "boxing" or nipping when their territory is invaded by the owner.

MYTH: RABBITS—ESPECIALLY DWARF BREEDS—DO NOT NEED MUCH SPACE

THE TRUTH IS: Rabbits have powerful hind legs designed for running and jumping. They need living space that will permit them ample freedom of movement even when they are confined. Dwarf rabbits tend to be even more active and energetic than some larger breeds, and require more space.

MYTH: RABBITS CAN BE LEFT ALONE FOR A DAY OR TWO WHEN OWNERS TRAVEL

THE TRUTH IS: Rabbits need daily monitoring. Problems arise quickly in rabbits. If a rabbit stops eating, for even one day, it could be a life-threatening situation and require immediate veterinary attention.

MYTH: RABBITS DO FINE WITH JUST RABBIT FOOD

THE TRUTH IS: The most important part of a rabbit's diet is grass hay. Hay needs to be provided as a free choice daily. Rabbit pellets should only be provided in limited quantities and be a pellet made from timothy hay without corn or other additives. A fresh salad made from dark green vegetables should be provided daily for proper nutrition.

