

Rabbit Housing

Cage Size

Rabbits should be housed in the biggest cage that you can afford or have space for. With that being said, this is not possible or practical in a commercial setting, so certain size guidelines should be followed. The ARBA suggests .75 square feet per pound of body weight for bucks and dry does. Does with litters should be housed in a cage with one square foot per pound of the doe's weight. The following chart has the guidelines that I use as bare minimums, but more space is definitely better.

	Single Animals	Does with Litters
Up to 4 pounds	18"x24"	24"x24"
4-7 pounds	24"x24"	24"x30"
7-11 pounds	24"x30"	24"x36"
11+ pounds	24"x36"	24"x48"

These are the absolute smallest cages that should be used.

The given measurements do not have to be used, but these are standard sizes sold by cage companies and 24" deep is better than 30" deep (which is also a standard size) because it is easier to reach the back of. For example, 30"x30" could easily be used rather than 24"x36", but it will be harder to reach the back of the cage. The more space that an animal has, the more it will move around. This will mean having animals with better muscling and firmer flesh condition. Also, animals that are overweight will have trouble breeding. Bucks will not want to service does and does will have fat around their ovaries that prevent them from conceiving.

Cage Material

The absolute best material to build rabbit cages out of is galvanized welded wire. The top and sides should be 2"x1" wire (although smaller is fine) and floors should be 1"x1/2". Chicken wire and hardware cloth should NOT be used, as they are not strong enough and if used on the floor, the small gauge will cut the rabbit's feet. The wire should be galvanized after welding (GAW) as it is thicker and will last forever. Galvanized before welding wire (GBW) will work, but it will need replaced sooner. Wire should be at least 16 gauge, but 14 is better, especially for floors as it prevents the floor from sagging and is smoother.

While it is often thought that wire floors cause sore hocks, this is a myth. Rabbits are more likely to get sore hocks on solid bottomed floors. Wire floor are infinitely more sanitary, while on solid floors, animals are often sitting in their own waste. The moisture and bacteria from their own waste are what cause the sores on the bottoms of rabbits' feet, not wire. However, floors

made of wire that is too thin of a gauge or that is rusty or rough can cause sore hocks. Thus, it is imperative that the proper equipment is used. Breeds with very thin fur on their feet (like rex furred breeds) may have problems with wire floors, but this trait should be something that breeders are trying to correct and animals that get sore hocks on wire should be culled to improve the gene pool.

Wood does nothing but harbor germs and breed disease, so wood should be avoided at all costs. If wood must be used, it should be sealed with safe paint and sanitized multiple times a year. Diluted bleach or vinegar should be used to thoroughly scrub the wood and then rinsed multiple times. After, it should be dried in the sun.

Cage Placement

Rabbits have very sensitive respiratory systems, so ventilation is of the utmost importance. Rabbits can adapt well to cold as long as they are out of drafts and the elements. On the other hand, rabbits will quickly overheat and die.

Rabbits kept in the house are safe from the weather and temperature changes, but ventilation can easily become an issue. If you can smell the ammonia from your rabbits' urine, there is not enough ventilation (this is true of rabbits kept both inside and out). This can be remedied by cleaning cages more often, using something such as pine pellets in the dropping pan, and running a fan in a window to draw out the air.

Rabbits kept outside in wooden hutches should be placed in the shade. The shade will help to protect them from the heat. If the droppings fall straight to the ground, the urine will soak into the grounds (unless there is a drainage problem with the soil) and there should not be a ventilation problem. Rabbits should have an enclosed place to get out of the elements that can be stuffed with hay or straw in the winter. The top of the hutch should be wooden and at most three of the sides. At least the front should be wire, but having the front and sides wire would be best.

Rabbits in all wire cages kept outside should be in some sort of building. This could be a garage, shed with windows and vents, or pole building with a solid roof and back. If the cages have pans, they must be cleaned at least once a week, more is better. Placing pine pellets, pine shavings, or peat moss in the pans will also help with ammonia. If the building is enclosed, such as a garage or shed, windows should be open at all times (even winter) and ideally a fan will be running to draw air out of the building. Cages where droppings fall to the ground should have either dirt floors or have a layer of pine or peat moss placed on the ground that is changed out weekly to absorb urine. As long as the rabbits are in a structure that keeps out rain/snow and wind, your rabbit does not need anything special in their cages unless it gets to about 10 degrees. At this point, you can offer a box with straw or hay, although they will probably play with it instead.

Cage Accessories

Rabbits are fairly easy to raise, but having the proper equipment makes it easier. Rabbits need a bowl or bottle for water, a bowl for feed, and possibly a toy or two. Bottles are superior to

bowls in that they cannot be dumped or soiled and have a larger capacity. While the bowls are slightly easier to drink out of, the bottles have many advantages. Many breeders use bottles while the weather is above freezing, and then switch to bowls in winter, as they are easier to get the ice out of. Another advantage of bowls in the winter is that the rabbit can break the ice to get to the liquid water or simply lick the ice if the water freezes. During the winter, rabbits should have fresh, warm water at least three times a day, if not more.

Rabbits can be fed out of almost anything. Dollar store bowls are a cheap way to go, but can be chewed and dumped. Special plastic crocks that attach securely to the cage are a good way to go, but can be chewed. My personal favorite way of feeding rabbits is with J-feeders. These metal feeders can be placed inside the cage or a hole can be cut in the wire to allow the feeder to be filled from the outside. They hold a large amount of feed for litters and grow outs and cannot be chewed. A good J-feeder will last forever.

Many people also provide their rabbits with toys. Toys keep rabbits occupied so that they do not get bored and start destroying things in their cages like bowls or develop bad behaviors, such as fur chewing. Things such as paper towel rolls, baby keys, and shower curtain rings make excellent toys. Toys sold at pet stores are generally very expensive and I have never had a rabbit that will play with them.

All cage accessories should be cleaned at least monthly. Everything can be taken out of the cages and soaked in bucket with diluted bleach or vinegar. Rinse well and air dry before returning to the cage. Anything that is cracked, chipped, sharp, or a possible choking hazard should not be placed in a rabbit's cage.