



Some Bunny to Love

With Easter on the horizon and spring just around the corner, it brings to mind the unofficial ambassador of this season – the rabbit. Now the 3rd most popular house pet in the UK, the humble bunny has attained that title with good reason. Rabbits are certainly endearing to look at, relatively inexpensive to house and feed, and with the proper handling can be very friendly and affectionate. For anybody considering adding a rabbit to the family this spring, or those interested in improving the quality of their own some-bunny's life, I have gathered a few helpful tips.

Rabbits in general are very healthy animals. Sadly, the most common health problems experienced by pet rabbits are caused by errors in their care and nutrition. The good news is that most of these are easily preventable. Feeding your pet rabbit properly is the most important thing you can do to keep them healthy and increase their lifespan. It is natural to reach for a bag of "rabbit food", fill the dish and feel confident in a balanced diet, as we do for our cats and dogs. However, rabbits have very specialized digestive tracts that simply cannot thrive on commercial foods alone. 75% of your bunny's diet should come from grasses and hay – foods that requires your rabbit's gut to do the work it was made to do. Supplementing this with a good quality pellet-based commercial food as well as fresh vegetables, and keeping sugary treats to a minimum will go a long way to keeping your pet healthy – as well as keeping him happy by providing the natural behavior of chewing and helping his teeth grow and grind properly. Like cats and dogs, rabbits should visit the vet yearly for a health check. Vaccinations are available against two deadly viruses: Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease. Your vet can help you determine your pet's vaccination needs based on his lifestyle, as well as provide specific tips for housing and feeding your pet to prevent problems before they start.

Socially, rabbits prefer to live in pairs or larger groups, however, same sex pairs may fight and mixed gender pairs will almost certainly....multiply. For these reasons, neutering your pet rabbit is a very good idea. Female rabbits in particular have a tendency to become aggressive towards their owners when they reach sexual maturity, a problem easily remedied by neutering.

Rabbits can be very rewarding and loving pets, and with proper care can live upwards of 6-8 years. Like all pets they need your time and care to help them reach their full potential. Rabbits simply do not thrive as "cage pets", nor are they suitable as a young child's pet as they can be fragile and easily injured. However, they can be

excellent family pets when given the interaction they deserve. So please, stick to chocolate bunnies for Easter presents, and if you do decide to add a bunny (or two) to your family be ready to make a serious commitment – you will get a seriously great pet in return!

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