a message to you, a 4H member

In this rabbit project, you are going to learn how to feed, manage and show rabbits. If you are raising rabbits for the first time, it is a good idea to start with young, purebred animals four months old. Usually, two females (does) and one male (a buck) of the same breed make a good beginning.

Use this manual. It has been written for you. It gives information you need.

It tells you where to get more information. There is a glossary of rabbit terms that can help you with definitions of words you may not already know. There are suggestions for exhibits. But be sure to check with your Extension Office to make sure your exhibit meets your own county's requirements.

Keep this manual as a reference. It is the manual for all divisions of the rabbit project so plan to use it from year to year.

a message to parents

Raising and marketing rabbits is an ideal project for young people, especially those in urban areas and on small farms where space may be limited. A rabbit project lets young people experience the satisfaction of owning a fine, purebred animal without spending too much money.

In this project your son or daughter can learn the principles of nutrition, care, grooming, breeding and showing rabbits.

All that is needed is a place to house rabbits, feed to keep them growing, a willingness to make the project a success and — most important of all — your child's interest.
You are going to like raising rabbits if you like working with animals. Rabbits are small and clean. They respond to kind treatment. They are easy to work with and are fun to watch. Raising them can even be a way to make money.

It is not difficult to raise rabbits successfully. But it cannot be left to chance either. It requires careful selection, good equipment, careful sanitation and planned mating.

Visit a few good rabbitries and talk to the men and women who operate them. Look over the equipment and pay very close attention to the arrangements.

Zoologists classify rabbits as mammals. They are in the order of Lagomorpha which includes rabbits and hares. Some breeds have many varieties based on color differences and ranging in mature size from 2½ to 16 pounds. The most popular breeds for meat and fur production are the New Zealand, Champagne D'Argent, Californian, American Chinchilla, Checkered Giant, Flemish Giant and Rex. If you are raising rabbits as a hobby, you might like the Dutch and English Spot because of their variety of colors and attractive markings.

Acknowledgement

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how to choose a breed of rabbits

Successful rabbit raising begins with purebred stock. Generally, you should choose a breed of rabbit that you like from the stock that is available from breeders in your county or neighborhood. It is important to get your rabbits from a good rabbit breeder. The American Rabbit Breeders Association (A.R.B.A.) publications have names of breeders. If there is one close to you, plan to visit the farm and select your stock. If this is not possible, write to one.

Do not try to buy the best show specimens from breeders unless you have a lot of money to spend. Instead, get good specimens from an established and proven bloodline.

It is up to you to decide how many rabbits to buy. However, if you plan to exhibit your rabbits in a 4-H Rabbit Show, you should begin with a trio (two does and a buck) of younger animals. Be sure to get them all from the same proven bloodline. If you do not plan to exhibit, you might decide to start with a good, bred doe and begin to build from her offspring.

When you choose your rabbits, consider these things:
- Select and buy the best doe (female rabbit) or does possible.
- Select and buy the best buck (male rabbit) possible.
- Select the does and buck from a rabbitry that has a reputation for selling top quality rabbits, that practices good sanitation and that keeps production records.
- Select your stock from a litter of rabbits that are the same size. Also consider the number of rabbits in the litter.
- Select rabbits that have the best pads on their feet and that have well-filled out loins, thighs and shoulders with dense fur undercoats.
- Always select healthy, disease-free rabbits.

Rabbits for Show
If you are planning to show your rabbits, you need to choose stock from the purebred parents of a breed recognized by the A.R.B.A. in their “Standard of Perfection.” For more information about this, write A.R.B.A., P.O. Box 426, 1925 South Main, Bloomington, Illinois 61701.

Whether you are raising rabbits for show, for market or for fun, the principles of feeding, breeding and management are similar for all breeds. However, when you exhibit rabbits on the show table, the judge may consider slightly different points of emphasis for each breed when he makes his placings. Therefore, after you choose a breed, it is a good idea to become familiar with the standards for that particular breed. Then you can follow a breeding program that will produce the proper type of rabbit for the respective breed.

Study the show rules, regulations and classifications carefully before taking a rabbit to show. Show rules place strict requirements on weight, color, size and age of rabbits entered. Although pedigrees are not usually required, good records make good rabbits even more valuable for show and meat production.

Rabbits for Sale
If you are planning to sell your rabbits, find out which kinds sell well in your market area before you select a breed of rabbits. Your market area may like small fryers. In this case select a smaller breed that reaches market condition quickly. Some of the best breeds for meat and fryer production are New Zealand, Champagne D’Argent and Californian.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breed</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Approximate Mature Weight (in pounds)</th>
<th>Principal Uses</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Chinchilla</td>
<td>Resembles the true chinchilla (Chinchilla laniger).</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Show Fur</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Californian</td>
<td>White body with dark or black nose, ears, feet and tail.</td>
<td>8-10½</td>
<td>Show Meat</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champagne D'Argent</td>
<td>Dark slate blue undercolor; blue-white or silver surface color with a lot of long black guard hairs.</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Show Meat</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checkered Giant</td>
<td>White with black or blue spots on cheeks, sides of body and hindquarters; wide spine stripe; black or blue ears and nose with black or blue circles around the eyes.</td>
<td>11 or over</td>
<td>Show Meat</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Black, blue, chocolate, tortoise, steel gray and gray; white saddle or band over the shoulder carrying down under the neck and over the front legs; white rear feet (stops).</td>
<td>3½ to 5½</td>
<td>Show Laboratory</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Spot</td>
<td>White body with black, blue, chocolate, tortoise, steel gray, lilac or gray spots; nose, ears and eye circles and cheek spots; spine stripe from base of ears to end of tail; side spots from base of ears to middle of hindquarters.</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>Show Meat Laboratory</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish Giant</td>
<td>Steel gray, light gray, sandy, black, blue, white and fawn. No two colors allowed on solids.</td>
<td>13 or more</td>
<td>Show Meat</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherland Dwarf</td>
<td>Selfs, shaded agouti, tan patterned and other varieties.</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>Laboratory Show</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>White, red or black</td>
<td>10-12 (does) 9-11 (bucks)</td>
<td>Show Meat Fur Laboratory</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>White; ruby-red or blue eyes; black or chocolate.</td>
<td>3½</td>
<td>Show Laboratory</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>Black, blue, Californian, castor, chinchilla, chocolate, lilac, lynx, opal, red, sable, seal, white</td>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td>Show Meat Fur</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satins</td>
<td>Black, blue, chocolate, red, copper, chinchilla, Californian, white and Siamese.</td>
<td>8-11</td>
<td>Show Meat Fur</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Marten</td>
<td>Black, blue, chocolate or sable, with silver-tipped guard hairs.</td>
<td>6½ to 9½</td>
<td>Show Fur Meat</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once you have an idea about what breed you want, it's time to think about two things: body build and fur.

Look at Figure 1. Check to see where the hindquarters of the rabbit are located. The hindquarters are not just the hind legs, but the legs and the loin up to the first rib on the forequarters. In order to have good hindquarters, the rabbit must have a wide loin section with well-rounded and full hips. The forequarters should be full and have a good thickness of meat over the shoulders.

Good fur is another thing to think about. According to the fur standard, there are four points to check: condition, density, texture and balance.

**Condition**
Look for a fur that is tight. You do not want a molting rabbit. There should be no breaks in the fur, no mats of fur and no stains. The guard hairs should be supple and glossy. The fur should look alive and brilliant.

**Density**
Look for a good thick coat of fur all over the back, sides, chest and flanks.

**Texture**
The texture of the coat should not be harsh or wire-like, nor do you want a silky coat or wooliness. Look for fur coarse enough in guard hairs to offer some resistance when you stroke the fur. Guard hairs are heavier hairs that protrude above the undercoat and protect it. The undercoat should be fine and soft.

**Balance**
Look for evenness and smoothness in rabbit fur. The fur should be a good length, not too long and not too short. A dense coat of short fur is better than a long thin coat. A dense coat of long fur is better than a short thin coat.
all about housing

Before you buy any rabbits, you need a place to house them — a rabbitry. The kind of building you need for this depends upon the location, the climate and the money you have to spend. Whether you go into rabbits in a big or small way, plan for housing — hutches — and equipment that lets you care for your rabbits with a minimum of manual labor. Care in feeding, breeding and handling the rabbits, as well as in cleaning the hutches and keeping the housing sanitary, is very important. Keep construction of housing as simple as possible. Design housing so you can carry out these tasks easily.

Make sure the housing is designed to provide enough fresh air for the rabbits. In hot weather housing needs to provide rabbits with shade and any cool breezes that may be available. In areas where there are strong winds and cold weather, protect your rabbit hutches by putting them in buildings that open to the south. During stormy weather, use curtains or panels to close off these buildings.

The equipment you need to raise rabbits can be very inexpensive and constructed mostly from low cost items found at home or easily available. You can make an inexpensive two or three compartment hutch out of wood with roofing materials and wire floors. Do not use metal roofs because they conduct too much heat.
(The more experienced club member may want to buy or make all wire hutches to put in a draft-free building.)

Hutches and Cages

If you build a hutch for your rabbits, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Construct a cage for the comfort of the rabbits. Even though sunlight is an excellent disinfectant, do not let it reach your rabbits because it bleaches out fur color, except for all-white rabbits. (Bleached fur will result in faults or a cut for poor fur color by the judge at the time of showing.)

- The ideal cage has an all-wire floor. Use 14 gauge wire, ½ inch by 1 inch, since it seems to contribute least to sore hock problems. Fourteen gauge wire is strong enough to support a 12 to 14 pound mature doe and her litter in a 30 by 30 inch cage.

- The ideal cage has wire sides, with the top and front made of 14 gauge wire, 1 inch by 2 inches, or ½ by ½ inch hardware cloth. The kind of wire you choose depends mainly upon the price, availability of materials and rabbit size.

- There are many variations in cage sizes and each may be used successfully. The size of the hutch generally depends upon the breed of rabbit that is going to live there. Figure 2 shows a 3-hole hutch. This size is quite satisfactory for this project. Remember you must protect the entire outdoor cage by an all-weather roof with an adequate overhanging eave, 14 to 16 inches. Rabbits must be protected from dust, rain and snow.

- Figure 3 shows a suitable outdoor facility that you can make.

Figure 2
Three-hole hutch built from 8’ material. Use turn button and spring-loaded latches to fasten doors closed.

Figure 3
Four-hole hutch built from 8’ material.
When you build semi-enclosed outdoor hutch, use construction grade material — 2 by 4 inch, 2 by 2 inch, 1 by 6 inch and ½ inch exterior plywood. Position the back and side panels of the hutch on the inside of the 2 by 4 inch cage floor bottom so that droppings and urine cannot accumulate in the corners. See Figure 4.

- Use a full sheet of plywood, 4 by 8 feet, for the roof. The back of the hutch should be one half of a sheet of plywood, 2 by 8 feet. For convenience, the cage floor should be 30 inches from the ground. Use white rolled roofing material (90 pound weight) or comparable shingles on the roof deck. Paint the sides and back or cover them with suitable all-weather material. Do not use metal roofing. It conducts too much heat.

- During cold winter periods, attach panels of ½ inch tempered masonite or other suitable material around the bottom of the hutch to close off the area to reduce drafts. Cold will not hurt rabbits if they are kept dry and free from drafts.

- Locate your rabbit hutch with its back to the prevailing winds and in the protection of trees. Trees should also be available to provide shade because hot weather can be a major problem for rabbits. If your backyard is not well-fenced to keep out people and animals, put a wire skirt around the bottom of your hutch to keep playful children and pets out of the manure. See Figure 5.

- Some breeders prefer the single hutch. Others build hutch with two or three tiers, one above the other. Each tier has compartments. The height of whoever takes care of the rabbits is a factor in determining how many tiers to use. Dropping boards should be used under each tier.

Here are diagrams of a low-cost, constructed rabbit hutch. Almost all of the lumber is of short lengths. A lot of scraps or odds and ends are used. The doors and dividers are bread racks, old refrigerator shelves or ½ inch welded wire. Small metal straps are used instead of hinges or hasps. The pen is designed to handle a doe and her young. After the young rabbits are eating on their own, the breeder can block the nest box opening, clean the box and leave it in the sun to dry. In the winter months, the box gives added protection to the rabbit.

Note: Do not use paint on the inside of the hutch because the rabbits may chew on it and get lead poisoning.
NOTE: All wire cages are satisfactory for rabbits inside a building.
Top View of Floor

18" SOLID FLOOR
24" WIRE FLOOR OR ALL WIRE FLOOR
2" LAP-OVER