



## Here Comes the Easter Bunny! Things to Know Before Adding a Rabbit to Your Family

We love our GSDs, and in the spirit of our love for all animals we wanted to share some information about our fellow furry and feathered friends who are the target of cuteness for Easter but often don't fare well after the holiday.



As spring brings renewed life, it is no coincidence that baby bunnies and chicks became the symbol of Easter. Their appeal is hard to resist, but if you are seriously considering one of these adorable critters, please keep in mind the following thoughts:

- *Animals are not a novelty* – they are living creatures, and selecting one as a family addition is a long term commitment.
- Once they get bigger, and lose their “cuteness”, they are often discarded.
- If you choose to get a bunny or chick and plan to keep them for the long term - you must think about what care they will need beyond the cute/baby stage.
- Chickens may not be allowed in your community, so you need to *check the city ordinances and your homes association for any restrictions*. If they are allowed, there may be a limit on the number of them and it will most likely be restricted to hens only.
- The unfortunate reality is, when these animals get past the cute stage or the novelty wears off, it is difficult to find placement for them and they are often discarded.
  - Domestic rabbits cannot live in the wild and *should NEVER be released outside to fend for themselves*. They are an easy target for predators or most likely die of starvation.





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- Most farmers won't take chickens when they don't know how the chickens have been raised – as they can't be integrated back into a flock (and farmers don't keep them as pets). Finding sanctuary for livestock is not an easy task.



If you and your family are considering adding a pet bunny to your household, be sure you know the realities, rather than the longstanding myths, about these misunderstood creatures. The following information is from the Missouri House Rabbit Society.

**Myth:** Rabbits are great low-maintenance pets that only live a year or two. It's fine to leave them alone for a day or two when the owner travels.

**Reality:** Although they can be lots of fun, rabbits are far from low-maintenance. They need a diet that includes a variety of fresh, dark green vegetables and fresh water daily, as well as Timothy hay. Like other pets, they need regular exercise, socialization and clean quarters. Well cared-for, indoor rabbits can live 7-10 years, and some live into their teens. This is the same life span as breeds of dogs, and requires the same level of commitment. Because health problems can crop up suddenly and become life-threatening quickly, they need daily monitoring.

**Myth:** Rabbits are dirty and strong-smelling, so are best kept in an outdoor hutch.

**Reality:** Rabbits are immaculately clean, often grooming themselves and each other (like cats), and most will readily use a litter box. Provided they have been spayed/neutered and their litter box is changed daily, odor is not a problem. Pet bunnies kept outdoors often are neglected once the newness wears off, and these highly social animals are happiest with companions—people, another bunny, or even a cat or dog (following proper, supervised introductions, of course!)

**Myth:** A bowl of rabbit chow and some carrots are all a rabbit needs for food, and they do not need to be seen by a veterinarian, as dogs and cats do.

**Reality:** The single most important part of a rabbit's diet is grass hay, which should be offered in large amounts each day; pellets should be given in limited amounts to ward off obesity and related health problems. Pet rabbits that have not been spayed or neutered often display aggressive behavior, even toward their favorite people, and females will be a great risk for uterine cancer. Only veterinarians experienced in rabbit care should do the surgery. Although rabbits do not need annual shots as cats and dogs do, their health depends on regular monitoring by



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both the bunny owner and an experienced rabbit veterinarian performing regular health exams.

**Myth:** Rabbits, especially dwarf breeds, do not require much living space.

**Reality:** All rabbits have powerful legs designed for running and jumping. They need living space that allows ample freedom of movement even when confined, such as in a cage. The rule of thumb for rabbit housing is 4' by 4' by 2'. Smaller bunnies actually need relatively more space, as they tend to be more active than the larger breeds.

**Myth:** Rabbits love to be cuddled, do not scratch and are perfect pets for small children.

**Reality:** Although some pet rabbits become great cuddlers, they are prey animals whose instincts tell them to avoid being picked up (“Uh-oh, I’m about to be eaten!”). They often kick and scratch when picked up incorrectly, and will defend their territory if approached too quickly. In general, children aged ten and older can learn to be patient and gentle enough for rabbit companions. As always, adults have the ultimate responsibility for the care of any household pet.

If you want more information, contact the Missouri House Rabbit Society (<http://www.mohrs.org>) a chapter of the House Rabbit Society, an international nonprofit rescue and education group.

