

Bringing Home a New Rabbit

While your adoption application is being processed, now is the time to plan for your rabbit's first few days in their new home. When the adoption is done and it's time to head home, you will no doubt find it an exciting time. For your rabbit, this is likely to be a frightening time. Their familiar surroundings are changing and changes like that are very stressful for rabbits. However, there are some simple things that you can do to help ease the transition into your home. During this critical period, the two most important contributions you can make are:

- Ø Set up a friendly, safe environment
- Ø Let him set the pace for getting acquainted

THE ARRIVAL

When you arrive home with your rabbit, take the rabbit to a quiet area of your home. Keep them in a cage or small exercise area until they become more familiar. Be sure to have their cage stocked with all the comforts of home – litterbox, food dish, water supply, solid place to rest, toys and a big hay pile. Provide a box or cover part of the cage with a towel to give your rabbit a feeling of additional safety.

Try to see the world from your rabbit's perspective: how do you and your household look to him? A lot of noise, movement and confusion will further frighten them. Because your rabbit is in unfamiliar territory, it will be insecure. Minimize touching or handling your new pet for the first day or two while it gets comfortable in its new surroundings. You will also want to keep your new rabbit separate from other pets until they have been checked by your veterinarian.

For the first few weeks, your rabbit may not be himself as he adjusts to the major change in his life. He may be slow to warm up to you, or overly affectionate. He may completely lose his litterbox habits, and need a refresher course after he's settled in. This is all part of adjusting and should even out with time. Be patient and don't be surprised if you continue to learn new things about your rabbit for several weeks!

GETTING ACQUAINTED

When adding a rabbit to our family, we may be ready right away to give and receive generous amounts of love and affection. Maybe that's because we're not the ones who have just arrived in a strange place, populated by foreigners who don't speak our language. Imagine how you would feel if the size difference between you were reversed: Only time will tell your new companion that she's among friends.

Let your rabbit explore at their own pace. If he's not ready to be petted yet, talk to him or to anyone while in his presence. Many rabbits seem to enjoy listening to their humans talk on the phone. Hang out with him in rabbit fashion, by sitting quietly on the floor. Show him that he can hop over to you, take a few get-acquainted sniffs, and then hop away again. This hands-off approach paves the way to a hands-on friendship, especially with shy or traumatized rabbits. As her fear diminishes, her curiosity increases. Place a small treat or two (a sprig of parsley or carrot-top, a sliver of apple) and a few toys on the floor next to you, to make his visit even more rewarding.

This adjustment period should be as long or as short as your rabbit wants it to be. Trying to force it along faster will actually result in delaying it further.

QUESTIONS?

As you are getting to know your new rabbit, questions are bound to arise. You can always contact the Minnesota Companion Rabbit Society at: 651-768-9755 or Info@MN.CompanionRabbit.org. Representatives are available to assist you with a variety of rabbit topics.