



Bonding Rabbits

This information was produced by the House Rabbit Society

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Prerequisites for a successful introduction:

Before attempting an introduction, the rabbits should be spayed or neutered, and you should wait for a full two weeks after the surgery before proceeding with the introduction. This delay both ensures proper healing and gives the hormones a chance to dissipate. This delay is especially important with a newly neutered male, as a male bunny can still be fertile for two weeks after fixing.

Many well-meaning rabbit caregivers bring a new rabbit home, put him with their existing rabbit, and think all will be fine. Sadly, these hasty introductions often result in serious harm or injury from biting, chasing, or other forms of attack. In addition, rabbits are not quick to forget, so a bad fight could hinder future bonding success. Taking the time, reading up, and waiting for two spayed or neutered rabbits to be introduced will ensure you the best possible chance at a loving, bonded relationship.

Work with Space:

Rabbits are extremely territorial. In wild rabbits, territorial behavior includes depositing marking pellets at the boundaries of the territory, chinning, urinating, and aggressive behavior such as digging, circling, and fighting. Wild males tend to defend larger territories while females concentrate on their nests. In our neutered domestic companions, hormonal causes may be absent, but territorial behavior still exists. Thus, when introducing new rabbits, territory must be considered and used to your advantage.

What you are trying to do is eliminate the possibility for them to develop any territorial behavior. So you choose introductory spaces that are as different from your bunny's territory as possible. Always introduce rabbits, regardless of sex or age, in neutral space first. (Obviously, if you're bringing home two bunnies together, then any space in your home is neutral space.) Possible neutral spaces might be: a room that your rabbit has never been in, a friend's home or apartment, the seat of a car, on top of the kitchen table, the garage, the bathtub, the back yard, etc.

- Try to bring your current rabbit with you to pick up your new rabbit, so that they can share that first car ride together.
- Work with the rabbits for at least 20 minutes per day. Make sure to spend some time with the rabbits in one or more neutral space every day. When you're not actively working with them, they should be apart if they fight when together. If they do not fight, then they can be left alone if you're not working with them, but not when you're not home at all.
- Every day, try using two different situations, one relatively stressful (like a car ride), followed by one relatively normal (the floor of a new room, the top of the bed). That way, you can try to gradually transition them from strange to normal situations, without them fighting. If you immediately attempt to let them run around on the floor together, without first having taken them for a car ride, they may forget that the space is neutral and fight anyway.

None of these suggestions will work by themselves, and none will work immediately (usually). Work with your rabbits every day, for at least twenty minutes, and when you're not working with them, keep them in eye contact of each other. Start with extreme scenarios and gradually move to less extreme. Do one extreme and one less extreme every day. The more often you work with them, the quicker the progress. If you want to move at a quicker pace, then you need to arrange a large block of time (like a week's vacation) in an extremely neutral space (like a friend's or relative's house). If one rabbit is elderly or otherwise compromised, then go slowly to minimize the stress.