

How Can You Make A Rabbit Happy?

The owner of an unhappy rabbit wants to know what she can do to help her rabbit be happy.

By Caroline Charland

Posted: November 13, 2009, 5 a.m. EST

Q: I have a Netherland Dwarf doe, Daisy, and there is something wrong. I have had her for six months now, and she looks very sad. She kicks a lot and tries to get out of her hutch a lot. We let her out every other day for exercise, but she hates going back in. Sometimes she chews on the plastic base of the cage. She made a hole in it, so now we have to buy her a new cage.

Daisy is not spayed, and she lives alone. I have tried to pick her up, but she runs away from me. She likes being petted on her back but not on her head. We use a squirt bottle to stop Daisy from chewing on things that hurt rabbits like electrical cords, but she kicks when we do this. I think she kicks a lot more than the average rabbit. She is obviously not happy. I spend lots of time with her, and I feed her lots of hay for fiber. She licks my finger sometimes. Please help us! I want her to be happy, and I don't want to send her to the animal shelter.

A: Oh dear, poor Daisy. First, check whether your hutch is large enough for a rabbit to live in. Rabbits need to run and jump when they please. She is chewing because she is trying to get out. If the hutch has a wire bottom, that is bad for your rabbit's feet. Rabbits need a solid surface to live on. Daisy is also probably lonely living all alone. So here is what I suggest you do.

First of all rabbits have a much safer life living in the house. Living outside the summers are too hot, rabbits can't keep themselves cool enough and often die from heatstroke. Depending on where you live, winters can be much too cold for your rabbit. In the house, rabbits do well living in an exercise pen. You can put a piece of kitchen flooring under the pen to protect your carpet. Get her a nice big litter box, put rabbit-safe litter in the bottom and pile it full of hay. This will get her using a litter box. Put a hidey-house in there for her and lots of rabbit-safe toys and chews to give her fun things to do. If you wish to see some examples, check my organization's website.

I suggest having your rabbit spayed. First, because female rabbits have a high chance of developing uterine cancer; by getting your rabbit spayed, you protect her from this. Second, rabbits that are not spayed tend not to use their litter box as well, they tend to get into things more and they can become very obsessive of their living quarters. Spaying also tends to help calm them down more. Finally, your rabbit should have another rabbit to live with so she is not lonely and bored.

Instead of spraying her with water to prevent her from chewing on things she shouldn't, try rabbit-proofing the room where she runs and plays. You can do this by getting cord covers to cover the electric cords so she can't get to them. Again, to see an example, you can check my organization's website.

It can be very scary for a rabbit to be picked up, so make sure your rabbit feels safe when you pick her up and hold her. Rabbits like to have all four feet on the ground, so spending time with her at her level will make her feel safe.

If you do all of the above, I think you and your rabbit will be a lot happier. Too many rabbits end up in shelters because people don't know the proper way to care for them. I am glad you are taking the time to do that.

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