

Rabbits Need Water

Fresh water is an essential part of a rabbit's daily diet.

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Rabbit Sesame/©Courtesy Connie Zeng
Rabbits require a lot more water than comparable species.

Although we don't think of water as such, it is a vital nutrient. All animals require water for life, but rabbits require more water than comparable species. For example, in one day a 5-pound rabbit drinks as much water as a 24-pound dog. In fact, the average rabbit consumes between 50 and 150 milliliters of water per kilogram (2.2 pounds) of body weight per day.

Bottle It!
A water bottle with a sipper tube is the ideal way to offer water to your rabbit. Almost all rabbits quickly learn to use the water bottle. Encourage your rabbit to investigate the new water bottle by smearing a little molasses or sweet jam on the end of the tube.

Discontinue the sweet treat once your rabbit begins regularly drinking out of the tube. Check the sipper tube several times per day to ensure that the water flow is unobstructed and free-flowing when touched.

Using a water bowl presents several problems. If a rabbit's dewlap is constantly wet from leaning over the water bowl, it could develop a skin infection. Breeds with pronounced dewlaps should definitely use a sipper tube. Water bowls are also more prone to contamination with fecal material or urine. The bowl must be checked, cleaned and replenished several times per day (as necessary). If you use a bowl for your rabbit's water, choose one that heavy enough to prevent the rabbit from tipping it over.

Food & Water Go Hand-and-Hand
When a rabbit does not have access to food, it drinks excessive amounts of water. After three days of food deprivation, a hungry rabbit might increase its water consumption by six and half times its normal intake. Conversely, if deprived of water, a rabbit's food consumption declines. After three days of not being able to drink water, it will stop eating entirely. This is an extremely dangerous situation.

Although it seems almost like an afterthought when you consider rabbit care, potable and abundant water is vital for a rabbit to remain healthy. Remember to always provide your bunny with access to fresh water.

Rabbits Can't Stand The Heat
Rabbits cannot endure water deprivation for more than 24 hours (even less during hot weather) without serious health consequences.

Rabbits generally tolerate cooler weather (if acclimatized and provided with adequate shelter) much better than elevated ambient temperatures. Temperatures above 84 degrees Fahrenheit are dangerous to rabbits, because they cannot sweat — except for sweat glands located only on their lips. Although dogs pant to dissipate excessive heat, panting does not work for rabbits. If a rabbit becomes dehydrated, it ceases panting. As the ambient temperature increases, rabbits usually drink less water, which can result in life-threatening dehydration and heat-related illness. Keep your bunny cool and protected from the heat on warm days.