

Rabbit Grooming Guide

Maintaining regular grooming habits can keep a rabbit healthy.

By Rabbits USA editors

A well-maintained coat and nails are more than just vanity — it's a good way to keep your pet healthy. Regular brushing reduces the amount of hair a rabbit ingests when it grooms itself, which helps prevent gastrointestinal problems. Likewise, overgrown nails are prone to getting caught on the cage bottom, carpet, rugs and other surfaces, which could cause painful tearing. Overgrown nails may also make it more difficult, and uncomfortable, for a rabbit to hop across slippery surfaces such as tile and linoleum.

Tips For The Fur/Coat:

How often you need to brush your rabbit depends on your rabbit's breed. The longer the fur, the more brushing needed. Long-haired breeds like Angoras need daily brushing, while short-haired breeds like the Netherland Dwarf can be brushed once a week.

Don't panic if you notice an unusual amount of hair on the brush during certain times of the year, especially during fall months, when rabbits tend to go through a molt. Molting means more fur is shed, which, to you, signifies more frequent brushing.

If your rabbit's fur becomes soiled, try gently combing or brushing the area clean instead of bathing your rabbit. Bathing is usually only warranted to treat flea infestation or if a rabbit becomes heavily soiled. (Consult your vet before implementing any flea treatment regime or product on your rabbit because some products may be harmful to rabbits.)

A rabbit's skin is very delicate and thin, so trimming the fur with scissors should not be taken lightly. Cutting out matted fur incorrectly can cause painful lacerations that may even require sutures. Having your pet groomed by a knowledgeable rabbit groomer or vet is a safer option. Owners should avoid trimming the hair on the bottom of the rabbit's feet and/or hocks because the fur in this area protects against pressure sores. If a rabbit gets an ulcer on a back foot, a bone infection may result.

Never trim your rabbit's whiskers. Rabbits use their whiskers to sense objects around them and to navigate around corners.

Tips For Nail Care

First, learn how to properly restrain your rabbit, because a jittery rabbit might jump and injure itself. Better yet, accustom your rabbit to allowing its feet to be touched.

Generally, rabbits need their nails trimmed every three months, depending on how fast the nails grow and if the rabbit has digging opportunities (soil to dig up or sea grass mats to scratch, for example).

Use a sharp nail trimmer, which will cause less torque to the nail bed when the nail is cut. The type of trimmer to use often depends on the rabbit breed. Scissor-type clippers might work better for smaller breeds, while dog and cat trimmers or guillotine-type clippers work well for larger rabbits with thick nails.

Always have a clear idea (and view) of how much nail you are about to cut before actually cutting. Trimming or filing should end just before the quick, which is the pink-colored live portion of the nail bed. Cutting into the quick might cause bleeding and a painful reaction from your rabbit. The quick is more visible in rabbits with light-colored nails. If your rabbit has dark-colored nails, ask your vet to show you where to cut.

If your rabbit's nail bleeds, apply direct pressure with gauze or apply a coagulant such as Cauter-Gel or cornstarch to the area. Ice can also be used to stop bleeding. If the bleeding doesn't stop within five minutes, consult a veterinarian.

Leave This To The Pros

Never attempt to trim your rabbit's teeth. Healthy rabbits generally don't require teeth trimming. A rabbit with malocclusion or other tooth alignment abnormality, trauma or genetic defect may need routine tooth trims, but this should be done by a