

## Rabbit Handling FAQ

**Gain your rabbit's trust with these tips for interaction.**

*By Laura Doering*

Rabbit Freckles/Courtesy Kevin Kolman

Rabbits need to feel safe and secure when interacting with people, so try watching your rabbit and letting it approach you instead of the reverse.

Rabbit Handling Question: How do I pick up my rabbit?

Rabbits are prey animals and, for some shy and skittish bunnies, being picked up often triggers a flee response. Have control over your rabbit's body, especially its hind legs, before lifting it up.

Picking up a rabbit as it attempts to run away or not holding a rabbit securely can lead to serious injury, such as a broken back. Never pick a rabbit up by its ears — this is a sure way to traumatize your bunny and cause undue pain. Never grab a rabbit by its midsection because it can injure its back if it kicks.

Instead, lift the rabbit up in a calm matter, with one hand under its belly and the other holding the back of its rump (not under it). Then support the back half of the rabbit's body with one hand, and support the front half, under the belly, with your other hand. For additional support, hold the rabbit close to your body. In households with young children, have the child sit on the floor, and then gently place the bunny on his or her lap.

Rabbit Handling Question: How do I bond with my bunny?

Start by trying to see the world from your rabbit's point of view: You're a prey animal, perhaps in a new, unfamiliar environment, and sudden movements, loud noises and creatures towering above frighten you.

To minimize your rabbit's fears, let it explore a small, rabbit-proofed room. Lie down on the floor, and simply watch your bunny. Rabbits are curious, and yours will eventually come over to you. Let it approach on its own terms. Once it has come by a couple times to check you out, see if it will accept some gentle head petting or a treat. Don't force petting or grab your rabbit. Make this a daily session.

Gaining a rabbit's trust may take a day or months, so patience truly is a virtue. Your rabbit will become more and more comfortable with you, and start to view you as a friend instead of a foe. One clear sign that your rabbit has accepted you is if it nudges your hand or hops on your lap — a rabbit's way of saying, "Pet me, please."