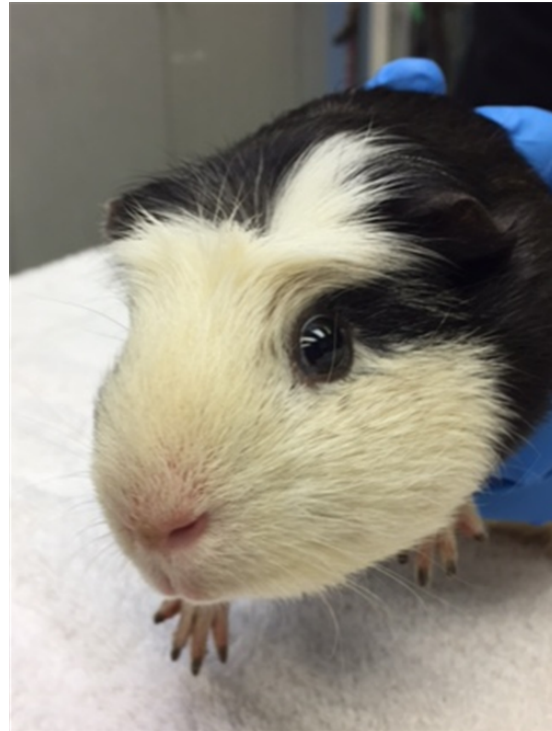


# Rabbit & Guinea Pig Adoption Handbook



**General & Medical Support:** (503) 988-7387

**Adopted Pet Behavior Helpline:** (503) 988-0033

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# Table of Contents

General & Medical Support: (503) 988-7387	1
Adopted Pet Behavior Helpline: (503) 988-0033	1
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Successful Homecomings</b>	<b>3</b>
Basic Supplies	3
Other Supplies	3
<b>The First Week Home</b>	<b>4</b>
Cages/Enclosures:	4
Diet:	5
<b>Housetraining</b>	<b>5</b>
Rabbits	5
<b>Physical and Mental Stimulation</b>	<b>6</b>
Rabbits and Guinea Pigs	6
<b>Introducing Small Animals to Children</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introducing Small Animals to Small Animals</b>	<b>8</b>
Introducing Rabbits to Rabbits	8
<b>Troubleshooting Any Problems</b>	<b>9</b>
House-soiling	9
Chewing	9
Fear/ Handling Sensitivities	9
<b>Resources</b>	<b>10</b>
Microchip registration	10
Behavior Helpline	10
(503) 988-0033	10
Outside Behavior Resources	10

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# Successful Homecomings

Adopting a new pet can come with a lot of change for both pet and pet parent, and having the right supplies on hand can help to make the transition as smooth as possible. Here is a list of supplies to help you start on the right foot with your new pet:

## Basic Supplies

- Appropriate cage or hutch for your new pet
- Food: The shorter the list of ingredients is- the better the food is for your new pet!
- Food and water bottle
- Bedding such as straw, hay, wood pellets, cloth or even a towel. Avoid cedar & pine shavings, they can irritate your pets nose & eyes.
- Low-sided litter pan
- Toys for playing & chewing
- Carrier

## Other Supplies

- Exercise Pen
- Nail trimmers
- Brush
- Treats



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# The First Week Home

Congratulations on adopting a new small animal! Below are some tips to help you both make the adjustment and settle into your new lives together:

- This may be a big lifestyle change for you. You are now responsible for every need of your new pet, including: daily feedings, fresh water, house-training, giving attention, and grooming. Regardless of rain, shine, sleet, snow, or daylight savings time, all animals still need to burn off energy. Young or high-energy animals will bounce off the walls if they can't expend that energy appropriately.
- Setting up a routine this first week is highly important. Most animals are creatures of habit, and the way they interact with the world around them can be shaped by how they feel about their environment. In order for them to be able to deal with any changes that come their way, animals must be established with a stable and consistent routine, so that they know what to expect from their new world and what the appropriate response should be. Set your new pet up on a routine so that they are waking up, going to sleep, eating and getting attention & exercise around the same time each day. This will help them to feel loved and secure and will strengthen the bond between the two of you.
- And of course, don't forget to take your new pet to a veterinarian!

## **Cages/Enclosures:**

Wherever you decide to house your new pet, ensure it's cage is large enough (5xs length of an adult rabbit or guinea pig) to provide for a litter box area, a feeding area and room to sleep, sit up comfortably on hind legs & of course, move around.

- Keep your Pet's cage in a draft free area that stays between 60-70F
- Thoroughly clean your pets cage at least once a week with warm, soapy water or an appropriate, non-toxic cleaner.
- Pet proofing your home is very important.
- Household plants can be dangerous and if one is within reach of your pet, it will be eaten! Keep houseplants out of reach & provide a safe alternative.
- Animals can be curious and like to chew therefore, any exposed electrical, computer and telephone cords need to be covered at all times.
- Protect your wooden furniture and baseboards by providing appropriate chews.

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- Purchase suitable items from a pet store or cut branches off of apple and fruit trees that have not been treated with pesticides.
  - Always avoid plywood, cedar and any *treated* wood products.

### **Diet:**

- Transition your small animal to its new food slowly (2-3 weeks) to avoid any digestive upset.
- Timothy or grass hay available at all times for a healthy bowel and trimmed teeth.
- Fresh water at all times; changed daily.
- High quality Pellets: Alfalfa or Timothy based **Protein 14-16% / Fiber 18% / Fat 3% or lower**
- 1/4 cup per 4 pounds of body weight. Stay away from pellets that contain dried fruit, sugar and seeds.
- Approximately 1 cup of washed veggies daily -introduce veggies slowly to reduce the likelihood of diarrhea.
- Snacks/treats: Fruits in small amounts (about 1 Tbsp), unsweetened shredded wheat.
- Some Rabbit Safe Vegetables and Fruits: Arugula, Banana, Basil, Escarole, Fennel, Grapes, Honey Dew melon, Mint, Mustard Greens, Papaya, Parsley and Strawberries

## **Housetraining**

As tempting as it is to give your new pet the run of the house immediately, it may be too overwhelming for them. It is best to set up a small area as you learn your new pets habits and as they learn the rules of the house. This area is a space they can hang out when they are not being supervised- where nothing important can get chewed up and accidents are easy to clean.

### **Rabbits**

Rabbits younger than 3 months old are easiest but most rabbits can be litterbox trained.

- Change used litter boxes at least once a day and completely clean and disinfect with warm, soapy water and bleach. Remember to compost your rabbit's droppings, they make excellent free garden fertilizer!
- Place a plastic litter box in your rabbit's cage and cover the bottom of the litter box with a safe type of litter and top that with plenty of hay for munching. Once consistently using the litterbox, you can add additional litter boxes to its roaming space to increase your rabbit's freedom.

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# Physical and Mental Stimulation

Your new pet has physical needs that will need to be met for their health and happiness.

No matter the age or breed, every pet needs exercise. Like humans though, each animal's physical abilities are different. Tailor exercise & playtime to fit your pet. Try to spend a few times each day engaging your pet in some form of activity out of their cage so they get a chance to stretch and move.

## Rabbits and Guinea Pigs

- The easiest game is to sit or lie on the ground and let your pet approach you. It will probably hop on and off you from every direction, investigate every bit of your clothing (watch out for nibbles!) 15 minutes well spent...
- Free roaming in a secure collapsible wire exercise pens with litter box, food, water & toys and a cardboard box to hide in.
- If you have a lot of room: build an obstacle course for your pet out of cardboard boxes, tunnels, newspapers and so on.
- Some small animals like playing with footballs or basketballs and will roll them around the floor, digging at them or even running after them when you throw it.
- DIY toys: a cardboard box, empty toilet paper rolls stuffed with hay, empty cereal boxes, wadded up paper balls, an empty coconut shell or even large PVC piping.



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# Introducing Small Animals to Children

Small animals and children can make great companions, however not all small animals have had a lot of exposure to children so it is best to introduce them slowly and always supervise their interactions. Children tend to move quickly and a bit erratically, and are generally unaware of where they are in relationship to where the animal is. This means that small animals have a difficult time understanding children and predicting what they will do. The following tips are great reminders to keep on hand when introducing small animals to children

- Respect the animal's personal space and let the animal initiate the interaction – the animal might not be comfortable right off the bat interacting with children.
- Never let a child take the animal's stuff (food, toys, sticks, etc.), especially when they are using or playing with it.
- Always ask the animal's owner before approaching and/or petting an unfamiliar animal. If an animal stiffens their body, turns away or looks uncomfortable, back off. It does not matter much a child wants to pet them, if the animal looks like they want out, let them go.
- Don't hug them – although this is what humans like to do, pets really don't like it. If they want attention, always pet them first under the chin or on the side of the head.
- Be ready to intervene in child/pet interactions if the situation is even remotely uncomfortable.
- Never assume your child and small animal can be left alone together without supervision. Children and animals always need to be supervised.
- If a pet runs during an interaction, try not to punish the retreat. This is valuable because it is one of the few tools they have to communicate they are uncomfortable. By blocking their escape, the pet is still feeling the same, but has no way of telling us.
- Do not tolerate teasing or mishandling of an animal from any child. If the animal is uncomfortable, remove them from the interaction and give them a quiet, safe place to relax.

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# Introducing Small Animals to Small Animals

## Introducing Rabbits to Rabbits

- Two new rabbits will take less time learning to co-exist than a new rabbit coming into a home with one or more rabbits that have established territory. Male and female introductions are usually the easiest while doe and doe can be a challenge. Buck and buck is the most difficult integration, as fighting is very common but two neutered males may be able to coexist with minimal friction.
- Rabbits are territorial so a first meeting should be in a neutral space such as a large, dividable exercise pen in a yard or in a room (that neither has spent a lot of time in) using a collapsible exercise pen used as a divider. Use treats on either side of the divider so they associate good things with each other. Reward for good behavior! Be sure to carefully supervise their interactions in the beginning and watch for signs of true aggression - be ready to intercede if they can't work it out! As they learn to accept each other you can let them interact without a barrier but do not leave them together unsupervised until you know they will not fight.





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# Troubleshooting Any Problems

## House-soiling

Regardless of your new animals housetraining history, they may need a refresher course on how to do it. To do this, you can either use your pet-proofed area or a cage to teach them. Leaving a few small feces in the designated area can help them learn to go to that place in the future as well.

- If your rabbit voids outside the litterbox, clean the urine with a paper towel and place that in the litterbox, put it's fecal pellets in there too, it will help the understand where it should go. Even house trained rabbits will leave some fecal pellets outside the litterbox, it's a way they mark the space as theirs!
- Be patient, it won't happen in a single day and be prepared to clean up during training. Keep club soda, white vinegar, or Nature's Miracle handy to clean up.

## Chewing

Chewing can be a very natural behavior- it is how animals can learn about their world, as well as keep themselves entertained! Remember- animals don't have an understanding of the value of your things and may just find your fancy shoes more fun to chew than their toys. This energy can be redirected so that your pet is only chewing appropriate items.

- Remove anything you really don't want to be chewed: shoes, wires, children's toys, books, etc.
- Find them toys they like to chew, or make them yourselves.
- Make sure to provide your pet with daily, exercise, playtime, and handling sessions to keep them stimulated.
- Chew proof the area they are in when you cannot supervise them.

## Fear/ Handling Sensitivities

- An animal that is not used to being picked up may avoid you or run away. It will take time for your pet to trust you. Be consistently gentle and use it's favorite treats whenever interacting with your new companion.
- Never pick up a rabbit by its ears, instead cradle the pet securely and support from under the back legs.
- If the animal is really anxious you can wrap in a towel but don't leave it wrapped up or your new pet may develop heat stress.

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# Resources

## Microchip registration

Register your microchip number online with Found Animals.

[www.foundanimals.org/](http://www.foundanimals.org/)

## Behavior Helpline

If you are experiencing any behavior issues with your newly adopted pet, call the Multnomah County Animal Services Behavior Helpline directly:

**(503) 988-0033**

- Please be prepared to provide your name, phone number, the pet's animal ID (located on your adoption paperwork), and your specific behavior concern.
- If there is no answer, please leave a message and your call will be returned the same business day.
- For emergencies, please Any medical issues should still be forwarded to Animal Health, by e-mailing [animal.care@multco.us](mailto:animal.care@multco.us).
- The Behavior Helpline is for animals that have been adopted from Multnomah County Animal Services. For behavioral help with pets not adopted from Multnomah County Animal Services, call our main shelter line at (503) 988-7387.

## Outside Behavior Resources

House Rabbit Society [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org)

Rabbit Advocates [www.rabbitadvocates.org](http://www.rabbitadvocates.org)

BunnyHugga [www.bunnyhugga.com](http://www.bunnyhugga.com)

Medical Care Guide for Guinea Pigs [www.guinealynx.info](http://www.guinealynx.info)

Cavy Madness [www.cavymadness.com](http://www.cavymadness.com)