



Rabbit Outdoor Housing

Recommended minimum sizes, ideas and why 'a hutch is not enough'



A Living Space

Essentially, when it comes to housing rabbits there is no such thing as a 'minimum' amount of space. An RSPCA-funded study at the University of Lincoln revealed that **rabbits are greatly motivated to seek more space** than is available in conventional housing. This means that rabbits need to be kept in a space that allows them to exhibit their normal behaviours at all times of the day and night.

For example, if you keep a rabbit in a hutch, even just overnight, you are denying them the opportunity to express fundamental behaviours such as stretching, running and jumping when they are most active (dawn and dusk). Placing a rabbit in an exercise run is no better because you are dictating when they should use the space provided. For this reason **we require a permanent run attached to a hutch**. To learn more check out: rabbitwelfare.co.uk/ahutchisnotenough.htm



Minimum Housing Sizes

The branch requires:

A hutch that is 6ft by 2ft by 2ft

AND

A permanently attached run of 6ft by 6ft in size and with a minimum height of 2ft.

The RWAFF recommend a run of 8ft by 6ft, so bigger is definitely better! Giants and larger rabbits are often not suitable for a hutch/run set ups and require a shed or wendy house with run attached instead. This is often a better set up all round for any bunny!

Hutch basics

The recommended minimum size already mentioned is intended for small to medium sized rabbits. **As a rule a rabbit should be able to take 3 hops in a row** before reaching the partitioned bed area (roughly 6ft in total).

Large hutches can be expensive and hard to find. Have you thought about converting an existing shed or wendy house? Ask our staff for advice!

The hutch should:

- Be elevated off the floor to avoid damp.
- Have a sloped roof with a suitable waterproof cover.
- Have sturdy bolts to lock the doors so foxes cannot access the hutch.
- Have weld mesh not chicken wire on the front—foxes can easily chew through chicken wire.
- Have a partitioned area for sleeping in.
- Be positioned out of direct sunlight with one side against the house or a wall for shelter and warmth.
- Be moved to a garage or shed during the winter or when very cold.
- During bad weather be covered with a blanket and rain cover. Make sure it is not too tight so as to ensure air flow. These covers must be removed first thing in the morning.

TOP TIP: When very hot provide very large plastic bottles filled with semi-frozen water to keep them cool.



Cleaning & Hygiene

It is vitally important to uphold good standards of hygiene with outdoor bunnies due to the **threat of fly strike** which can be fatal.

- Toilet areas/litter trays should be cleaned out daily. A full, deep clean twice/three times a week.
- Line the base of the hutch with newspaper or lino, you do not need to use wood shavings (it is messy and not very absorbent).
- Use water bottles not bowls and check each day they are working properly. If in direct sunlight they will turn green with algae. You can buy a bottle cleaning brush to scrub them thoroughly.



Run Basics

The recommended minimum size for a rabbit run is 6ft x 6ft. However, sadly many smaller runs are available online—be savvy, just because it is for sale doesn't mean it is suitable!



The run should:

- Be made from sturdy wood and weld mesh.
- Have a top covered in weld mesh to prevent anything jumping in – or bunnies jumping out!
- Have tarpaulin covering the top in inclement weather, and you can consider covering a side or two too. They should be able to exercise in all weathers if they choose!
- Be high enough for a rabbit to be able to stand up (min. 2ft).
- Have a part-base of mesh that covers all the edges to prevent unwanted digging & escaping!
- provide lots of boxes and tunnels for them to play and hide in.
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TOP TIP: During sunny periods provide shade in the run with some form of cover, e.g. wooden board, garden umbrella etc.

Litter trays

Rabbits are naturally very clean animals and only tend to go to the toilet in one or two places. This means they can be easily trained to use a litter tray (if neutered and are not competing for territory).

Ideally, litter trays should be lined with newspaper/shredded paper or paper based litter then covered with dust-free hay as rabbits like to eat whilst they toilet. The best design of litter tray are ones that have one low lip, for ease of access, along with some high sides such as a plastic dog bed or corner shaped litter trays, as rabbits tend to lift their bobtails when they urinate therefore the high sides prevent spillage.



Social Interaction



Rabbits are highly gregarious creatures which is why we only rehome rabbits as pairs to live outdoors. The more time you spend with any rabbit the more sociable they will become. Being outdoor rabbits must not be an excuse not to spend time with them!

- **Human interaction with outdoor rabbits must be at least twice a day for no less than half an hour.** Ideally this interaction would be for an hour each time whilst cleaning them out and sweeping up. This is a vital time to check over the rabbits and make sure they are acting normally (abnormal behaviour is often a sign of illness).
- **Always check your outdoor rabbits before going to bed at night,** ensuring they have sufficient water and all locks are secure. A small padlock is recommended for extra security.
- **Try simple training games with them.** Rabbits respond to their names and will come over when called. Some rabbits will learn they get a tasty treat if they go back in their hutch & run when they hear a bag of parsley rustling at night.

Where to Buy

The best place to start is on the Rabbit Welfare Fund website, they have a list of approved rabbit housing retailers: www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/walloffame.htm