

Bonding Rabbits Together

Bonding Basics

Bonded rabbits tend to live longer, stay healthier, and greatly enjoy the company of a friend. Just like people, rabbits have distinct personalities and prefer to choose their own companions. Your bonding goal is to match two rabbits with compatible personalities. Appearance, size, age, and gender play no part in whom your bunny will or will not like.

It's difficult to predict how two rabbits will feel about each other until they meet. Rabbits' reactions to one another can vary from love at first site (about 10% of the time) to neutral indifference (about 80% of the time) to aggression or strong dislike (about 10% of the time). To find an appropriate bondmate, introduce your rabbit to several potential friends. Observe how your rabbit reacts to each candidate, and pick the one that seems the most compatible.

Before Introductions

Check for health

The first stages of bonding can be stressful. If your rabbit isn't feeling well when you begin introductions, additional stress can push them over the edge into illness. Scheduling a wellness check with your vet first is highly recommended.

Spay or neuter

Male and female rabbits both need at least four weeks after surgery for their hormones to dissipate. Male rabbits take up to six weeks to become sterile after they're neutered. Females need three to five weeks after spaying to reduce the risk of injury and ensure proper healing.

Plan for neutrality

Prepare a safe, enclosed, neutral area for introductions and bonding sessions. This must be a place where neither rabbit has spent time. Rabbits are territorial and will be more defensive on their own turf.

Consider the commitment

While some newly introduced rabbits bond quickly, others require a considerable bonding period. Rabbits should have daily bonding sessions for a period of two weeks to two months, depending on the rabbits. If you will be away for the weekend or unable to hold daily interactions, you may want to wait to start bonding until your schedule clears. Lapses between bonding sessions can create setbacks and prolong the bonding period.

Be Prepared

Bonding sessions must be closely supervised. While some negative behaviors are normal, they shouldn't be allowed to escalate. Wear long sleeves and gloves. Keep a broom on-hand to separate fighting rabbits without being injured. Focus exclusively on their interaction; rabbits can seriously hurt one another if your attention is elsewhere.



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What to Expect

Positive interactions:

- Relaxed, normally behavior
- Grooming themselves or each other
- Seeking each other peacefully
- Sitting or lying near each other

Negative Interactions:

- Persistent chasing
- Persistent mounting
- Fighting
- Growling

When rabbits meet, one will often establish dominance. Both male and female rabbits show dominance by mounting one another. This is a normal part of the process, but it's good to limit the behavior (5-10 seconds, then gently push the top rabbit off). If one rabbit mounts the other's head, it may lead to injury. Separate them right away. Rabbits may also chase, bat, or nip. Allow them to work things out without allowing the negative behavior to escalate. If either rabbit shows forceful or persistent aggression towards the other, separate them immediately.

Your interaction can encourage your rabbits to become friends. Help them associate bonding time with positive experiences. Put the rabbits side-by-side, and pet and praise both at the same time. Allow them to share a salad, or offer them a special treat while they are together. Never favor one rabbit over the other, and always try to end bonding sessions on a positive note.

Another bonding tactic is "stress bonding." Rabbits who face a mildly stressful situation together often develop a sense of comfort in one another. Examples include sharing a carrier during a car ride or sitting together in a laundry basket on top of a running dryer. The nervous rabbits will huddle together for support and begin to trust one another.

No matter which method you use, start with daily ten to fifteen minute bonding sessions. If things are going well, gradually increase the time they're together. Even if they are making progress, never leave them unsupervised.

Becoming good neighbors

Once the rabbits are getting comfortable with one another, put their living quarters close to one another. This allows them to see and smell each other and get used to the other's presence. For their health and safety, there must always be a barrier between them and both must have a hiding place to retreat to if they are feeling stressed.

Once your rabbits seem comfortable living side-by-side, try swapping some of the rabbits' toys and supplies. This helps them get used to the idea of sharing possessions. Some people even find it helpful to have their bunnies swap pens.

Living together

Once your rabbits are peacefully spending one to two hours together daily, they can be introduced into their intended permanent living space, initially under supervision.

Bonding Resources

It may be helpful to speak to your vet or to an experienced shelter or rescue volunteer for more detailed advice before and during the bonding process. Online groups, forums, and websites can offer first-hand tips, tricks, and trouble-shooting. If you're concerned about either rabbit's health or behavior, don't wait to seek veterinary advice.

