



Rabbits are highly social animals who benefit from having a companion. When selecting a friend for your rabbit, it's important to keep in mind their compatibility to ensure a smooth introduction. Here's a guide to help you choose rabbits for pairing and introduce them effectively.

Preparation

Before introducing rabbits to each other, it's important to make sure they **are both spayed or neutered**. This lessens territorial marking, social conflict and prevents breeding. If either rabbit has recently had a spay or neuter surgery, wait **at least 4 weeks** before introducing them to each other so their hormone levels are fully adjusted, and they don't risk injuring their surgery site.

Find a neutral space to introduce the rabbits to each other, like a room that neither has lived in before. Rabbits are territorial, so having a neutral space that neither rabbit considers their own will help with a smoother introduction.

Each rabbit will need separate enclosures and supplies because they will not be living together, but will be beside each other in their own living space in the same room - like being neighbors rather than roommates.

Introductions take time. Sometimes rabbits take to each other quickly, while others take longer. Don't be discouraged if your bunny bonding needs slow introductions over the course of a few weeks. Each animal is different and patience is key to ensuring a healthy introduction, which will benefit your rabbits in the long run.

What to Consider When Pairing Rabbits

Some characteristics and combinations of rabbits are easier to introduce than others. Some factors to consider when choosing a bunny buddy include:

- **Temperament and Energy Level:** A very playful or assertive rabbit may overwhelm a less sociable or active rabbit. Physical health may affect their temperament or energy level.
- **Age:** Rabbits of similar ages may be easier to match since they'll likely have the same energy levels, and this ensures they'll be companions for life. Larger age gaps between rabbits may lead to an aging, less active rabbit becoming intolerant of a younger active rabbit, or passing away sooner, leaving the remaining rabbit lonely.
- **Male or Female:** Generally, introducing rabbits of the opposite sex is easier than introducing rabbits of the same sex. Introducing rabbits of the same sex is possible, but may take longer.
- **Size:** Rabbits do not need to be the same size, but people typically choose rabbits of similar sizes to live together. Pairings rabbits of different sizes can be successful, but might require some extra monitoring during play to ensure the smaller rabbit does not get injured.



How to Introduce Rabbits

1. In a neutral spot, set up each rabbit's living space a few inches apart, so they are living side by side in their area. They should be able to see, smell and hear each other through a barrier, but not be in direct contact with each other. Let them become used to their new living arrangements and each other for at least a week before moving onto the next step.
2. When you notice they're relaxed in the environment, start slowly introducing the rabbits to each other by introducing their scents to each other: swap towels between them, so they are familiar with each other, but not physically together yet. Do this for a few days and monitor their reactions to see how well they are adjusting to the changes.

Signs Your Rabbits Acclimatizing

- Sitting near each other along the barrier
 - Doing normal things, like eating, using their litterbox and resting
 - Rabbits acting neutral towards or ignoring each other
3. Once your rabbits appear to be adjusted, and are neutral towards or curious about each other, you can start having supervised "play dates." Make sure you are always supervising and watching for any signs of tension or conflict.
 - Choose a neutral space outside of their enclosures for the rabbits to spend small periods of supervised time together. This space should have plenty of hay, food, litter boxes, toys and spaces for the rabbits to hide in.
 - Start with short, supervised introductions approximately 15 minutes per day.
 - Make sure to reward your rabbits with tasty treats or other things they like during introductions. This will help form positive associations.
 - If there are any signs of tension, separate them before it escalates and try a supervised visit again the next day.

Signs of Tension

- Vocalizations like grunting, growling or screaming
- Flat ears
- Stiff, raised tails
- "Thumping" the ground with their back leg
- Repeatedly targeting the other rabbit's face or head
- Charging or lunging
- Standing up and using their front feet like they're boxing



Sometimes rabbit play can look like fighting because rabbits will nip at each other and then run away to play, chase each other or mount each other. However, these behaviours shouldn't injure or irritate the other rabbit. When determining if your rabbits are playing or fighting, look at the intensity and persistence of their actions.

Signs Your Rabbits May Be Fighting, Not Playing

- One rabbit being persistent in biting, chasing or mounting the other, or the targeted rabbit becoming irritated
- Prolonged or persistent mounting - mounting is normal, but if one bunny becomes agitated, then mounting can be a problem
- Biting – rabbits nip at each other during play, but it shouldn't draw blood
- Using claws and teeth to target each other
- Fast, rough chasing of the other rabbit's tail, especially in a tight circle - this will look like a "tornado" and should be interrupted immediately

Tip: If a fight does happen, use something like a blanket or broom to split them apart. Do not put your hands in between them because you could get injured.

4. As your rabbits spend more time together with no signs of conflict, you can increase the amount of time and/or frequency of their supervised "play dates." We recommend after 3 successful "play dates," increasing the length of time your rabbits are together by 5 minutes.

Signs Your Rabbits Are Getting Along

- Grooming each other
 - Eating and drinking from the same bowl or near each other
 - Using the litterbox together
 - Resting together
 - Playing with each other
 - Sharing hiding spaces
 - Relaxed posture, like flopping over and laying on their sides near each other
5. Once your rabbits have had multiple, successful play dates – meaning:
 - The 5-minute time increments are increasing
 - They are consistently showing tolerant and social behaviour (like resting together and grooming each other)
 - They can spend 1-2 hours together without any conflicts

They are finally ready to have some unsupervised time together.



Small Animal Behaviour Guide Rabbit Introductions & Bonding



6. As your rabbits become more tolerant of each other and can be alone for a few hours together, they can transition into the same living space. We recommend trying a few overnights together, then seeing how they do for a full 24-48 hours together before transitioning to permanently living together.

Once your rabbits are bonded, it's important to keep them together. So, if one rabbit must go to the vet, the other one should go with them as well.

NOTE: We **do not recommend** "stress bonding" rabbits. "Stress bonding" is where rabbits are put in a space together and then placed in a stressful scenario, like in a moving car or on top of a running laundry machine. These methods are not recommended as they expose your rabbits to unnecessary fear, anxiety and stress. Using methods like slow introductions are gentler, minimize the amount of stress your rabbits experience, and lets your rabbits build a bond at their own pace.

Additional Resources:

For more information and other free resources for pet guardians visit our website:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/behaviour-resources/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us general behaviour questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

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