

RABBITS 101

Rabbit projects for FFA and 4H students will teach an individual responsibility, plus gives them a sense of accomplishing a task in their life. Rabbits are also a project that does not take acres of land an enormous amounts of money to get started.

Rabbits are not the laid back easy breeding projects that everyone takes them to be. Rabbits are very moody and have their psychological moments. There is a period when the buck goes sterile due to summer time heat (over a consistent period of 86+ degrees). Then there are the ladies (does) that have a period of depression and do not want to breed. This normally happens during the winter months. Plus, a rabbit can be fine one day and then you look in their cage and find them very sick.

When a student first starts off wanting to get a rabbit project they have to make a decision on whether they are going to show breeding stock or produce fryer rabbits for the county fairs. Well, most individuals do not understand how many different breeds of rabbits there are and how to get started in the breed they choose. Most students start out raising rabbits for their county fairs but began seeing how many shows and major shows there are throughout the state. Then they combine their efforts to raising fryer for their FFA projects and then showing at local shows and one to two major livestock shows.

The parent organization of the show rabbit industry is the American Rabbit Breeder Association. Most states have a state organization, as does Texas -Texas Rabbit Breeder Association. Within the state are numerous rabbit clubs. Each breed also have their speciality club in each state. A set of standards that each breed must be judged by has been set - up by the ARBA. This called the "Standard of Perfection."

Then there are the judges. These are men and women who have past a period of time as a breeder and show competitor and then passed the requirements set forth by the ARBA to become a licensed ARBA judge. Then the clubs or associations, putting on shows, pay them to come to their shows and judge your rabbits. Something too remember about

judges - this is one man or woman's opinion for that show. Not everyone judges exactly the same. Each judge enjoys judges certain breeds more than others and may have never raised or seen certain breeds.

This brings us to the breeders of those breeds represented and accepted by the ARBA . Each breeder thinks their breed and especially their rabbitry has the best breed alive. Promotion of each breed is what keeps the association and breeds going. Each breeder has their little secret formulas and feed rations. And when it comes down to it, genetics, feeding a good feed, records, sanitation and management plays the biggest part in being successful in producing a good line of rabbits. There are breeders that are in the breeding side just trying and make a dollar, however, there are breeders that are full of knowledge and enjoy working with the youth and adult breeders just getting stated.

Address and contacts of ARBA, TRBA, show schedules, individual specialty clubs , and breeders can be obtained by emailing me at hkdarden@yahoo.com. I will also have membership applications with these notes.

Rabbit Facts

- Cage size: Large breeds : Californians, New Zealands, Satins, Etc
24 x 24 x 24 for individuals
24 x 30 or 36 x 24 for Does and litters or
Two or more individuals up to 5 lbs
- Medium Breeds: Holland Lops, Dutch, Mini Satins, etc.
24 x 24 x 16 for individuals and does and
litters
- Small Breeds: Netherland Dwarfs or dwarf breed
18 x 18 x 24 for individuals
18 x 24 x 24 for does and litters

Door ways must be big enough to get nest boxes and water bowls (if used) in and out very easily. Plus, if hand breeding is done, then you have easy access to handling does. I usually keep bucks in the doe/litters size cages.

Bucks need to be kept separate and in their own cage. When breeding, always bring doe to buck's cage. Remember rabbits cages or hutches need to be in a shady area or under a tin roof. Rabbits need to be out of direct sun light and out the elements. And especially away from dogs.

Feeding and Watering

The two most essential elements in rabbit management or clean feed and fresh water.

FEED: Can I said which feed is better than another - NO All I can tell you is what feed I have had more success feeding. There are several things you most look at. Availability. drive time, cost and how often the feed is rotated at the dealer.

You need only to feed a good 15-16 % feed. Purina, Dumor, MG, Nutrena, Petrus, Blue Bonnet and others are all fed here in Texas.

Try not to get started on a feed ,only to realize that you are almost out, Saturday evening, and the feed store is closed Sunday. Then on Monday you or your parents go to your local dealer and find out they are also out and the next truck want be delivering until Wednesday. What to do-What to do!!!!!!! For this reason I feed Dumor Rabbit Feed. I get it at Tractor Supply. Tractor Supply is open 7 days a week. Plus, it is milled only for Tractor Supply. I have spoken with the Nutritionist, in Ft. Worth, and she almost came out a said this feed is milled by Purina with a little different protein additive. If you tell your supplier that you are feeding their brand they will keep it on hand. It runs about \$14.00/50 lb bag. It is a very clean a well made small pellet.

NOTE: Do not feed rabbits vegetables from the garden. The only thing I ever feed is sweet potatoes. This helps keep moisture in my show rabbits at caged shows. You do not know if there is any chemical residue on them.

Read And Remember: Just a note - Bucks and does beg all the time . Do not feel sorry for them and give feed to them free choice to feed. Remember large rabbits get only a cup of pellets daily. You must evaluate each animal. Some does need a little more for maintenance. Just a note- rabbits will beg and act as if they are starving. Do not feed them. They will become over weight and breeding problem can occur. Feed only what they will clean up over night. Rabbits are nocturnal by nature and will eat at night and clean up feed, if fed in the evenings. If they leave feed - cut back on the amount you give them. Feed grass hay, alfalfa and supplement feed in the mornings and pellets at night.

Feeding pregnant does and maintaining her weight after kindling. Does need only one cup of feed up till she kindles. After kindling use this simple rule : Does regular ration and 1/4 cup / kid nursing. This will keep doe in good shape a help with milk production.

After kits start leave the nest box, watch and see when they start eating pellet feed . You may want to increase the total feed by what they will clean up. Never just put a bowl of pellets in cage.

A good grass hay needs to be feed daily. Just enough that they can clean up over night. Cubed alfalfa hay can be fed one or two times per week. Also, if you feed grass hay daily, when kindling time is close, does will carry hay around in their mouths, looking too build a nest box.

Feeding Kits

The object is to get the kits on feed as soon as possible. However, the kit digestive system is very slow developing and needs a little help. Many breeder go out and order or buy expensive supplements. But the same thing can be done with Yogurt. Take a syringe and give each kit about 1/4 cc of active lactobacillus, twice a week. Starting at 14 days old until they are 8 weeks old. Increase the amount given by ½ cc every two weeks. You have to make sure not to give them loose bowels. If this happens stop.

When kits start leaving the nest box, add a little Quaker Old Fashion Oatmeal on top of the mother's feed. This will state the kits to

going to the feeder and start them to eating pellets faster. This ration of Oatmeal will be the basis for the supplement feed to be added. Oatmeal is easy to digest since there is no hull and rabbits love it.

A ration of the following can be started at about 4 weeks of age and fed every other morning. Do not mix this ration with pellets. Bunnies will scratch through pellets looking for grain and will throw pellets on ground. For this reason we feed this in the morning and pellets at night. Feed in a separate small bowl and remove at pellet feeding time. Bunnies seem to enjoy setting in them and peeing.

Supplement ration mixture: 2/5 Quaker Oats Old Fashion Oatmeal
 1/5 Crimped oats
 1/5 Crimped barley
 1/5 Black Oiled Sun Flower seeds

When bunnies begin eating free choice you should keep pelleted feed in front of them 24/7. Try weaning them at 4-5 weeks of age. No later than 6 weeks. Remove doe from cage or move bunnies into other cages.

Water and Watering Systems

Good clean water -daily- is a must. Water keeps moisture in the meat and digestive system.

You can use water bowls or set up a automatic nipple watering system. Automatic watering nipple system is what I use, due to the easy and time consuming work of watering the large number of rabbits I have. I also add minerals and a vitamin supplements which can be distributed evenly throughout the rabbitry.

I run one cup of bleach, each week, through the system to sanitize nipples and kill any bacteria in rabbits mouths. Plus, if you take rabbits to a show, and have no water, you can add a little bleach to the facilities water and the rabbits will think they are drinking water from home. Rabbits can tell the difference in water by smell and taste. And some times will not drink outside sources of water. Always carry water from home, if possible, to the shows.

I also have carried a small 2 gallon bucket set up to the county show and placed it on top of the cage with one single nipple to the cage and watered rabbits. Removing it when they are finished drinking.

De-worming, Ear mites and Hair Balls Medicine Used for Rabbits

Like any type of livestock or domestic animal, rabbits have worms and must be de-wormed. I will give de-worm schedule and then give medication used.

Pregnant does - Two weeks before kindling

Do not de-worm fryer rabbits

Every 90 days

Mixture : 9 cc Propylene glycol - can be gotten from vet or vet supply
1 cc Ivomectin - Vet or feed store

Mix together and administer in the ear canal at a rate of 1/4 cc per ear or swab with Q-tips until ear is damp. Do not push Q-tip deep into ear. This will also help control ear mite and canker ear, which is a heavy crusting of the ear canal.

Rabbit lick themselves as a cat does. They can develop hair balls. Grass hay helps with this problem, however, not a complete clean out will occur. Therefore about every 90 days, I give each rabbit two doses of feline hairball remover over a three day period.

Rabbits can develop colds, runny noses, weepy eyes, diarrhea and fever. You can use several things:

Cold, fever, runny nose, etc. - Penicillin G at a rate of 1/2 cc / day for three days

You can also give children benydril at a rate of 1/2 cc /day for three days

Diarrhea - Immonia D -

Give two doses / day

First dose 1 cc followed by ½ cc does for three days. Take feed away and feed only hay and 1/4 cup oatmeal daily for two days You may watch for dehydration. Children's Pedicare can be given.

When starting pellet feeding, you may want to give them a yogurt treatment.

Sore hocks - Preparation H

Spread over the raw spots and put a piece of sheet rock in the cage for the rabbit to set on. The rabbit will also chew on sheet rock and get some calcium out of it. Don't worry about it. You may want to keep a factory made hock saver in cage.

What if my rabbit goes off feed?

With a syringe give the rabbit 1cc of Creamed Spinach Baby Food - three times per day until the rabbit starts back to eating. You can also give live oak leaves. Dried or green.

Breeding and Getting Does Ready

Most people think all you have to do is put a buck and doe together and you will have kits in 32 days. **WRONG!!**

Doe can be very moody and bucks can be very lazy. This is where and good feeding and management program came into play.

Does have their mood swings and will fight the buck if she is not ready to breed. However, to get does in the mood a little wining , dining and romantic trips away from home can change everything.

Note: what ever you feed and water does with, do the same for the buck.

Getting the doe ready and trying to syncinizing several does to breed with a window of days can be achieved.

Several weeks before the time of breeding, beginning giving does a water soluble vitamin and mineral in their drinking water. I use Aqua-Lite and Aqua-Vite. I get it from Bryant's Supplies in Channelview. Several people can split an order. Do not over medicate the water. Does may go off water. If so, back off the amount added to water system. I use a water picture and add 1 tables spoon /gallon picture of each source. It will turn yellow in color.

Start giving green leafy hay-alfalfa cubed hay and fresh spinach leaves daily. I know I said never feed vegetables to them. This is the main reason. It should be a treat. Make sure you wash leaves real good.

Now, here comes the thing that will make you will think I'm crazy for suggesting. Several days before the breeding days. Load the does in carries and give them a round the neighborhood for about 30 minute.

When you return home try her with the buck. If nothing place the does in a cage together for several hours. They may fight, however, this stress helps stimulates the breeding process. If doe let buck cover her, place her in her separate cage. Repeat this for several days with each unbred doe. Check the does with the buck after every trip. If the does will let the buck cover them, then it is working. Do this early afternoon due to the breeding schedule I will be placing you on.

Buck can breed several times / day. Try to wait about 15 minutes between trying each doe. If a doe lets the buck cover her and copulation occurs, try to re-breed the doe within a six hour window then a third time in 12-18 hours. If the doe does take the buck, after the breeding, remove the doe and turn her on her back and cradle her, like a baby and carry her around. Do this for several minutes. This will increase semen flow toward the female reproduction tract. Remember-have I clipped her toe nails. If not, you will.

Getting the doe adjusted to being cradled could take time and can be started when clipping toe nails, before breeding.

Then wait 28-32 days. GOOD LUCK!!!!!!

Toe nail care: Rabbits have only two ways to defend themselves. Biting and scratching. To protect the rabbit and yourself, you must clip their nails. About every 60 days toe nails need to be cut. The more you handle the rabbits the gentler they will be. Just clip the end of the nails. If you get too deep into the nail bed you will get blood. Remember- Clip the dew claws. Use small set of side cutters to clip with

Sore hocks: Some rabbits develop sore on the pads of their feet. They can not sit still and will not move around. Put a piece of sheet rock or plywood in cage for them to sit on, if this occurs. Put Preparation H on sores. This helps heal the tissue. It may take several days to a week to see any change.

Supplies for rabbits can be purchased from Bryant's Pet Store and supplies in Channelview, Texas. They do ship. Tell them I referred you to them. 281-452-1433. You can also order a catalog. I also use KW Cages out of California. 1-800-447-CAGE

Things need in supplies:

- Small side cutters for toe-nails
- Preparation H for sore hocks
- Clorox or bleach to clean waters and to add to water
- Aqua Vite and Aqua Lite - several can buy a bottle and share.
- Hair ball medicine
- Penicillin G for pasterella - Talk to your Ag teacher
- Ivomectin De-wormer /Propylene glycol- Talk to Ag teacher
- Vaseline - can be put on toe nails if cut too close
- Spray bottle and brush - I use my hands

- Q-tips
- Antibiotic Ointment
- Eye drops

Getting Ready For Kits

There is nothing special to be done to the doe. Feed her and keep fresh water for her. Nature takes over and the doe will do everything. However, sometimes they need a little help.

As stated in statement about feeding hay and a doe letting you know it is time. Does are little home makers, if you provide what they need to protect their kits from the elements.

Palpate does at 12-16 days Does hide babies and you may not find them in the third week. One of those nature things

Gestation period is 28-32 days It varies with the doe.

Nest boxes - The box only needs to be a little wider and longer than the doe. Can be made out of wood. However, after box is removed from cage. Wash down with bleach and sun dry for 24-48 hours.

Do not put them into the cage until the 28 day

Fill with hay or shavings -Pine not cedar.

If you put them to early, doe will relieve themselves and you will have a nasty mess for the kits

Doe will pull hair at about 12 hours before kindling.

Wait until doe is finished and has gotten out of nest box to look at kits. Count them and remove any died babies.

Temperature: Fur and hay will keep kits warm. If temperature is below 53 degrees, nest box can be taken out a put inside and returned for doe to feed kits. Most does only feed once a day. Therefore, if you place box back inside cage twice doe will feed everyone.

After kits get hair coverage, box can be left outside.

Do not place heat lamp lower than 18" above nest box.

You will have fried rabbit.