

Burgess<sup>TM</sup>  
SINCE 1790

# Excel



HOPPING OFF  
ON THE RIGHT FOOT

[WWW.BURGESSPETCARE.COM](http://WWW.BURGESSPETCARE.COM)



# BURGESS PET CARE

## A BRITISH FAMILY COMPANY



Burgess Pet Care is a British family company with a 300-year heritage. With our passion and expert knowledge we have been able to develop high quality and nutritious foods for a variety of animals from dogs to hamsters.

Our Excel brand was established in 1998 when we became the first company to make single component extruded nuggets for rabbits. In 2014 we supported research by the University of Edinburgh which highlighted the impact of muesli style diets on the health of rabbits. As a result of this research we stopped making muesli for all animals.

## RABBIT AWARENESS WEEK

Every year we run our Rabbit Awareness Week campaign which helps to educate rabbit owners and potential owners about the welfare needs of these wonderful animals.

We have written this booklet to help you get into good habits with your rabbits right from the start. We recommend that you also read our 'Five Rabbit Welfare Needs' guide for some more detailed information

If you have any further questions please contact us at [consumer@burgesspetcare.co.uk](mailto:consumer@burgesspetcare.co.uk)



Brought to you by:

**Burgess** *Excel*  
SINCE 1795

Proudly supported by:



# INTRODUCTION



## RABBIT FACT FILE



**LIFE EXPECTANCY:** 8-12 YEARS

**RABBIT NAMES:** MALE – BUCK  
FEMALE – DOE  
YOUNG – KITTEN

**ANIMAL FAMILY:** LAGOMORPHA/LEPORIDAE

**BEHAVIOUR:** MORE ACTIVE AT NIGHT &  
AT DAWN AND DUSK

**DIET:** HERBIVORES, OR AS WE LIKE TO  
CALL THEM 'FIBREVORES'

**HOBBIES:** BURROWING, 'BINKYING', GROOMING  
& PLAYING WITH OTHER RABBITS

You've made the decision to get rabbits, you've read up on the basics in our 'Thinking about getting rabbit guides', so what's next? How should you prepare for their arrival? How will you make sure they settle in well?

Our handy 'Hopping off on the right foot' guide will help you get set up and get into good habits when it comes to looking after your bunnies and keeping them happy and healthy.



# PREPARING FOR YOUR RABBITS' ARRIVAL

Before you go and collect your rabbits you should make sure that you are fully prepared and have everything that you need to meet all their needs. Check out the shopping list in our 'Thinking of getting rabbits?' guide.

You should prepare their environment to make sure it is bunny proofed and safe. Here are some key things to think about:

## SIZE MATTERS

Your rabbits' shelter should be permanently attached to a large run which is safe and predator proof, so they can exercise freely. The shelter itself should be as big as possible but at an absolute minimum L2m x W0.6m x H0.6m, this is so that they can take 3 hops and stretch fully upright. Their full enclosure should be at least L3m x W2m x H1m.

**RABBITS  
SHOULD LIVE  
IN SUITABLE  
PAIRS OR  
GROUPS**

## ELECTRICAL WIRES

Rabbits love to chew so make sure they can't access any cables or wires if they live or ever come indoors. You can encase wires in protective trunking and keep wires high up wherever possible. Always make sure your rabbits aren't left unattended when free roaming the house.

## PLANTS

Some common plants (especially but not limited to bulb grown plants) can be toxic to rabbits, so please ensure that you remove these or ensure that your







rabbits' will not be able to get to them. House plants should be kept high up and in a separate room to your rabbits if they live or come indoors.

You can find a list of common household poisonous plants at [burgesspetcare.com](http://burgesspetcare.com), if you are unsure always check with a vet.

## ESCAPING

You should always check that your rabbits housing is escape and predator proofed, bunnies can get through surprisingly small gaps and they can dig holes to escape very quickly!

# BRINGING YOUR RABBITS HOME



## HOW TO SAFELY TRANSPORT RABBITS

Ideally you will get your rabbits from a local rescue, breeder or pet shop as travel can be stressful for them so the shorter the journey the better. Please also bear in mind when choosing which rabbit friendly vet practice to register them with.

## WHAT SHOULD I USE TO TRANSPORT RABBITS?

To safely transport them home you will need a suitable pet carrier which needs to be sturdy, non- collapsible and cannot be easily chewed or escaped from. Cardboard boxes are not suitable as these can become unsafe if chewed or they get wet.

## WHAT IS A SUITABLE CARRIER?

The carrier should be ventilated and be big enough to allow all rabbits being transported to be able to lie comfortably and turn around. You will need to line the carrier with something to absorb urine such as newspaper or a towel.

Only put rabbits in the same carrier if they are already bonded, this will help them to feel a bit safer and ensure that the same scents are transferred to both rabbits.

## HOW DO I GET THEM INTO THE CARRIER?

To entice them into the carrier, use a healthy treat, and ensure there is some feeding hay already in the carrier for them. Fresh water should also be available, non-spill bowls or bottles are available, check which way your rabbits are used to drinking.

## HOW DO I SECURE THE CARRIER IN MY CAR?

Ensure that the car is cool and well ventilated, never place the carrier in direct sunlight. Use the seatbelt to secure the carrier in the direction of travel or secure it in a footwell behind a seat.

**CHOOSE A  
CARRIER WHERE  
THE TOP LIFTS OFF  
SO THE RABBITS  
CAN BE REMOVED  
EASILY**





# SETTLING THEM IN

Arriving in a new home for the first time can be stressful for rabbits so it is important that you have lots of patience and make the experience as calm as possible for them.

The first thing to do is to make sure that it is quiet, away from sources of noise. Being prey animals, rabbits will find sudden and loud noises scary. Placing some familiar items in their housing will help them to feel more comfortable, for example this could be some toys or blankets that they have had with them in their previous environment. Make sure there is plenty of hay and fresh water too.

It may be tempting to try and stroke or handle them to help to calm them, but it is often best to leave them alone to explore their environment in their own time whilst they get used to their new surroundings. You should check on them regularly to ensure that they are eating hay, drinking water and passing plenty of droppings.

Once they seem more comfortable you can start to approach them, try sitting by their housing and talking to them quietly to see how they respond. You can also offer a healthy treat through the wire of their housing, be patient whilst they get used to you and feel comfortable approaching you.





# HANDLING YOUR RABBITS

They don't enjoy being picked up so you should only do this when it is absolutely necessary, for example when performing a health check or clipping their nails (you can read more about this in the health section of our Five Rabbit Welfare Needs guide).

If you do need to pick your rabbit up follow these steps:

- Approach them from the side, quietly and slowly. They have a blind spot at the front of their nose so approaching head on will scare them.
- Let your rabbit come to you and talk to them softly.
- Stroke them gently.
- Gently take hold of your rabbit by putting your hand across their shoulders first and then slipping it under their chest.
- Scoop your free hand around their bottom and pull them up so their head is tucked in your elbow. This makes sure they are fully supported.



## REGISTERING WITH A VET

It is recommended that you register with a vet as soon as you get your rabbits as they will need regular check-ups and vaccinations, it gives you peace of mind that you know you have a good vet to contact in an emergency.

Rabbits have complex needs so you should always register with a rabbit savvy vet. You can find your nearest rabbit friendly vet by visiting [rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://rabbitwelfare.co.uk) who have a comprehensive list of vets who have demonstrated a greater knowledge of rabbit care.

# VACCINATIONS

Rabbits need to be vaccinated every 12 months against Myxomatosis, Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (RVHD and RVHD2) all of which are often fatal. Always check when getting rabbits if they have been vaccinated, if so request evidence, if not book them in with a vet for their jabs as soon as possible. Rabbits can be vaccinated from 5 weeks of age.

# NEUTERING

Neutering is strongly recommended for both male and female rabbits (castrating in males and spaying in females). There are lots of benefits to neutering such as allowing rabbits to be kept in pairs or groups, avoiding unwanted pregnancies and helping to reduce the risk of certain types of cancer. For more information on neutering and pre and post-operative care speak to your vet.

# ROUTINE HEALTH CARE

You should regularly give your rabbits a nose to tail health check at home to look for any obvious signs of illness or injury. You should also take them for a check-up with a rabbit savvy vet at least every 12 months.

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU SHOULD CHECK FOR AT HOME:

**Eyes:** Check for discharge and discolouration

**Nose:** Check for discharge

**Fur & skin:** Check that the fur is clean and there are no sores visible. Also check for any signs of dandruff or fleas or damp or soiled areas, look for risk / evidence of fly strike

**Teeth:** Check length and alignment

**Weight:** Check their body weight and note any changes

**Ears:** Check for mites, redness or any discharge

RABBITS  
ARE PREY ANIMALS  
SO TRY TO HIDE  
SIGNS OF ILLNESS  
OR WEAKNESS

# FEEDING

Follow the Excel feeding plan for healthy rabbits. You can find more detailed information on dietary needs and the rabbit digestive system in our Five Rabbit Welfare Needs Guide.



Hay  
should make  
up 85%-90%  
of a rabbit's  
diet

MOVE  
AWAY FROM  
MUESLI

# ENRICHMENT

Rabbits are extremely playful so it is important that you provide them with lots of rabbit safe toys to keep them occupied. Great, inexpensive options include willow balls and cardboard tubes.





# Burgess THE *Excel* FEEDING PLAN

92% OF VETS RECOMMEND EXCEL\*



FEEDING HAY



EXCEL NUGGETS



NATURE SNACKS



FRESH GREENS





FRESH WATER



## THE COMPLETE DIET FOR RABBITS

[www.burgesspetcare.com](http://www.burgesspetcare.com)

  @burgessexcel

\*Annual survey of UK vets