



Learning the Litter Box Habit

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Helping your rabbit learn to use a litter box is a big step toward her freedom inside your house. Most rabbits take quickly to the idea, and need very little encouragement. Some, however, need their human to be particularly patient, observant, and encouraging.

■ Supplies

Start by placing a plastic litter box in your rabbit's cage (you can also use a plastic corner litter box with a high back as a spray guard). Fill the bottom of the litter box with a safe type of litter topped with plenty of grass hay for munching. Add additional litter boxes and increase your rabbit's freedom as she succeeds.

Do not use clumping, clay, corncob, cedar, or pine bedding. These are known to cause potentially fatal blockages and respiratory and kidney problems.

Do use vegetable fiber litters, shredded newspapers, compressed sawdust pellets, straw, hay, paper pulp or recycled paper litters, or aspen litter. Rabbit-safe litter brands include: Carefresh, Cat Country (but not CatWorks or other cat clumping litters), Critter Country, Crown Animal Bedding, Aspen Supreme, Good Mews, Natural Harmony, Gentle Touch, and ECOfresh.

■ Tips

Clean the litter box(es) often. Rabbits often will not use an overly soiled litter box. The droppings make excellent garden fertilizer!

Reward good behavior. Make the litter box an inviting place with toys or favorite foods. Entice your rabbit to sit, sleep, or be groomed in her litter box to reinforce the notion that a litter box is a safe and enjoyable place.

Do not punish bad behavior. Punishment sends the wrong message to your rabbit about using the litter box. Be prepared to clean up during training. Keep club soda, white vinegar, or Nature's Miracle handy to clean up messes.

■ Fixing Common Problems

Too much freedom too soon – Allowing your rabbit too much room to roam during litter box training causes confusion. Until litter box habits are established, reduce your rabbit's space or place multiple litter boxes in her space.

Unneutered or unspayed – Rabbits learn to use litter boxes more quickly when they are neutered or spayed. Hormones are the primary reason for aggressive (and prolific!) territorial marking.

Expecting instant results – Learning to use a litter box doesn't happen in a day! Remember that it takes time and your patience to achieve success.

Dirty litter box – Make sure the litter and any food items in the litter box are fresh; if not, your rabbit might choose another location to eliminate.

Other rabbits in the house – Most rabbits (even spayed and neutered) are territorial around other rabbits. Leaving urine or droppings around the litter box is a way for your rabbit to establish her territory. A few droppings around the litter box is not a sign of failure.

No two rabbits are exactly alike – Your rabbit's personality might suggest to you unique ways to encourage her litter box habits. A couple of good sources for additional ideas online are House Rabbit Society's Litter Training FAQ at <http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/litter.html> and our Litter Box Training article at www.adoptarabbit.org/articles/packet/litterbox.html.