

Chapter 1

Is a Rabbit Right for You?

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the realities of rabbit ownership
 - ▶ Finding out about rabbits beforehand
 - ▶ Parceling out duties to family members
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Rabbits are cute, fuzzy, and make great pets, but these truths alone aren't good enough reasons to own one. If rabbits are so wonderful, why not have one? The answer is simple: Though rabbits are terrific companions for many reasons, they also demand plenty of work and a serious commitment. For example, my friend Sarah (name changed to protect the not-so-innocent) works eight hours a day at an office job and spends another hour a day commuting back and forth to work. So she's gone from her home a good nine hours a day, and that's on the days when she comes right home from work. Often, Sarah, who is single, meets her girlfriends after work for happy hour or heads off to the gym to exercise. On those nights, she doesn't get home until 9 or 10 p.m. Because Sarah's schedule doesn't give her enough time to spend with a dog, she opted for a rabbit. She should have chosen a hermit crab. A rabbit, a very social animal, would be just as unhappy as a dog in this situation.

In addition to the number of hours that you need to spend with a rabbit, also consider the workload and responsibility involved in owning a rabbit and whether you really want to deal with it. A rabbit needs watering, feeding, exercising, and interacting along with having her fresh foods washed and her cage cleaned — all on a daily basis.

If you find yourself with the overpowering urge to be a rabbit owner, it's time to ask yourself some questions before you actually take the plunge. If you take the time to do the soul searching that ultimately comes along with answering these questions — both you and your rabbit will be happy — should you decide to get one.



What happens if you don't ask yourself these questions and just go out and get a rabbit because you *think* you want one? If it turns out that rabbit ownership isn't really right for you, then the rabbit will ultimately suffer. Typically, when people don't want their rabbits, they end up taking them to an animal shelter or turning them loose in the woods in the hopes that the rabbit can get by on its own. Sadly, rabbits are put to death in animal shelters, just like their canine and feline counterparts, and domesticated rabbits that are set free to fend for themselves are rarely capable of doing so. Finding another home for him is an option but not an easy one. Prospective rabbit owners don't grow on trees, as you will quickly find out when you start trying to find another home for your rabbit. So spare yourself and the rabbit all the heartache and probe deep into your psyche before taking the plunge, using the following questions as a guideline to your self-scrutiny.

Why in the World Do I Want a Rabbit?

People are drawn to rabbits for different reasons. Most of them think rabbits are cute (and they're right). Others want to breed and show them for enjoyment and prestige. Some are looking for a pet that's less work than a dog yet different from a cat. The fact that rabbits are cute and fuzzy may motivate you to explore the possibility of rabbit ownership. That's okay, but notice that I said *explore*, not *jump into* rabbit ownership. Before you acquire a rabbit, you need to find out as much as you can about rabbits and what's involved. Only then can you have a thorough understanding of rabbit ownership really means. This book can help you do that.



Meanwhile, check out the following few reasons *not* to own a rabbit:

- ✓ It's Easter time, and you think getting a rabbit would be a fun way to celebrate the holiday.
- ✓ You think a rabbit would look good sitting in a hutch outside in your backyard. A bunny in the yard may lend a rural feeling to your garden decor.
- ✓ You want to breed rabbits, so you can make a pile of money.
- ✓ Your child wants one, and you plan to teach him responsibility by making him care for the rabbit.
- ✓ Your dog needs a companion, but you don't want to get another dog.



The only truly legitimate reasons to get a rabbit is for companionship and/or to get seriously involved in the purebred rabbit community. Any other reason bodes trouble — for the rabbit.

Am I Ready for a Rabbit?

Fantasizing about owning a rabbit is quite different from actually being ready to take one on. Think hard about your lifestyle and whether this is the right time to be adding such an animal to your household. Ask yourself these questions:



- ✓ **Do I have at least three hours of free time a day?** Your rabbit needs at least two hours of exercise, which is described in Chapters 15 and 17. That leaves another hour to clean his hutch and to groom, feed, and water him, which is described in Chapters 5 and 6. Are you embroiled in something right now that's taking up much of your time or energy? Like the holiday season, a move, or a personal transition, such as a new marriage or divorce? Are you putting in long hours at work on a special project? Do you travel often for work? (If so, see Chapter 16.) Do you have a new baby (as opposed to an old baby)?

Adding a new pet to the household during an already stressful time can be disastrous for all involved. Wait until things settle down and are back to normal. That's the time to bring a new rabbit into the home.

- ✓ **Do I have the space to house a rabbit?** Can I put him in my yard or in my house? Does my apartment complex allow pets? Rabbits require adequate cage space (see Chapters 5 and 6 for more information on this), and you must have the room to accommodate this. You must also do some investigating to find out if you are zoned for rabbit ownership. Rabbits aren't allowed in some residential areas. Check with your local zoning board to find out.
- ✓ **Can my kids handle the responsibility?** Kids and rabbits make great companions, providing the children are old enough to respect the rabbit and are properly supervised. Mishandling can result in serious injury or even death of the rabbit. Likewise, rabbits who kick or even bite when held improperly can hurt children. See Chapter 9 for a more detailed discussion of how to properly handle a rabbit.



Give serious thought to whether your children are old enough to behave properly around a rabbit and whether you have the time to properly supervise their interaction time with the new pet. Children can't be expected to be in sole charge of the rabbit. In fact, an adult must oversee the rabbit-caring tasks that children are given for the sake of the rabbit.

- ✓ **How will my other pets get along with a rabbit?** Rabbits can get along with other pets, depending on the type of pet they're being asked to live with. Introducing your pet rabbit to another strange rabbit may jeopardize one or both pets, putting them in serious danger. Rabbits have been known to kill each other, and two male rabbits may try to castrate each other. Cats and rabbits often come to tolerate each other, and cats rarely

pose a danger to rabbits. (Although not common, cats can injure rabbits and should be supervised during their initial time together.) Birds and rabbits usually just ignore each other, as long as they're given ample room to stay away from each other. Dogs, on the other hand, can be a real problem for a rabbit. (See Chapter 13 for tips on how to figure out if your pets can get along.)

- ✓ **Am I willing to alter my lifestyle?** Rabbits are notorious diggers and chewers and can make short work of your backyard or your wooden furniture legs if you don't make certain changes to your home environment. You have to thoroughly rabbit proof your home and/or backyard if you bring a rabbit into your life. And in many cases, the results of your rabbit-proofing won't exactly be an asset to your home decor. (Chapter 6 can help you figure out how to rabbit proof your home, and Chapter 14 supplies the details on how to train your pet.)
- ✓ **Do I have enough money to set up and sustain my rabbit?** You need cold, hard cash (or a warm credit card) to purchase any rabbit, plus the cage and supplies that your rabbit must have to be comfortable. You should also have money on hand to pay veterinary bills (see Chapter 9) for the annual preventative physical exam, in the event of an illness, and the health difficulties that becomes more likely as the pet ages. (See Chapters 7 and 8 for details on rabbit health.)
- ✓ **Am I ready for the emotional commitment?** Rabbits are friendly, sociable creatures who need plenty of attention to thrive in a domestic environment. Think about whether you can make the emotional commitment to a rabbit. For more about the emotional aspect of owning a rabbit, see Chapter 14.

Of course, before you go out and get that rabbit, make sure that you did your homework and know *exactly* how to take care of this delightful creature. (See Part II in this book for more on housing, nutrition, and healthcare.) Find out about rabbit breeds to make sure that you know what kind of rabbit you want. Study up on rabbit behavior, so you'll understand your pet right from the get-go and be sure to make that all-important decision about whether your rabbit will live indoors or outdoors before you bring your pet home. Find a veterinarian experienced in the treatment of rabbits before you make your purchase rather than *after* an emergency arises.



All rabbit owners must do a number of tasks that take time, but you must also determine who can perform them. If you live alone, you'll obviously perform them. (No rabbit likes to clean his own hutch.) If you have a family and the rabbit will belong to everyone, then tasks must be delegated. Before your rabbit comes to live with you, sit down with your family and have a meeting. Discuss the tasks described in this chapter, as well as who will perform them, and when. A written schedule can do wonders to encourage slackers to keep

up their end of the bargain. This is a great way to find out if your family isn't committed to owning a rabbit. If this is the case, then you can put off any plans for a new pet rabbit and thus spare your family and the rabbit from going through the hassle.

However, for the family that's willing to undertake a few extra chores for the sake of a furry new pet, taking care of a rabbit isn't too hard, especially if everyone in the family agrees to pitch in. Table 1-1 has some tips on who may best be able to perform the various tasks required of rabbit owners. (All these tasks are described in detail in Part II.)

Table 1-1: Divvying Up the Tasks

<i>Task</i>	<i>How Often</i>	<i>Who</i>
Feeding the rabbit	Daily	Kids of all ages can easily perform this task as long as an adult monitors them and makes certain the child is performing this important job. An adult should wash and cut up fresh foods for the child's safety and measure out pelleted feed beforehand.
Changing the water	Daily	Older children can make sure the rabbit has fresh water daily; adult supervision ensures the job gets done.
Spot cleaning	Weekly	Older children can remove soiled bedding and wipe down the dirty spots of the cage each day. Adults need to make certain that this is being done; a dirty cage can result in health problems for the rabbit.
Cage cleaning	Weekly	Depending on the type of cage (a hutch or smaller indoor cage), an adult or an older child should do this job.
Exercise	Daily	A child of any age can help a rabbit exercise by playing with the bunny or simply watching to see that the rabbit doesn't get into anything he isn't supposed to as the rabbit runs around on his own. It's important that adults be the one to lift and carry the rabbit if the children are young. Children should be monitored when they're playing with the rabbit to ensure that they don't chase or accidentally hurt the bunny in any way.

