



Bonding Rabbits - A Mini Guide

Remember not all rabbits get along, bonding can be a lengthy process and patience is needed. Adult supervision is essential at all times. Fighting must be prevented because injuries can be so severe they can prove fatal. Some pairings will not work due to incompatibilities in these cases a new bonding should be attempted until a suitable partner is found. 3-5% of bonding attempts will be love at first sight. 3-5% will never bond. Others can take from 2 days to 2 months and occasionally longer.

Re-homing centers make bonding easier because they will swap/offer new rabbits until an appropriate match is found due to the number of rabbits they are re-homing. They also can offer advice due to their experience on regularly bonding rabbits for re-homing.

Rabbits have instinctive social behaviors and a pecking order needs to be established between two rabbits. Therefore some grouching, chasing and humping can be seen. This is not usually aggressive. If any aggressive behavior is observed the rabbits must be immediately separated.

Bonding can only work in neutered rabbits. Bonding is unlikely to work with two females neutered or otherwise. Two males can be attempted, they take longer but they must be neutered. The ideal pairing is a male neutered and female neutered pair. Neutering pet rabbits allows them to live calmer, longer, healthier lives. Rabbit hormones can cause aggression towards humans and other animals. Neutering stops the production of powerful reproductive hormones, which allows for calmer less complicated lives and of course prevents breeding.

Bonding

Visual contact method

This method can take time but generally produces good results but if the pairing is unsuitable it can be time consuming. Rabbits are housed separately side by side within visual contact. Two medium sized dog crates are ideal for this purpose. Both rabbits should have an area in which they can hide. Intermittently the rabbits should be swapped cages to allow each rabbit to get used to the others scent. This can make a huge difference to the speed of bonding. You can also swap toys intermittently. If your rabbit has free run of the house you will need to have your crates in an area that is neutral and swap access so both rabbits take a turn in all areas.

Dating

The two rabbits are placed together in completely neutral territory where neither have previously been. A large room is best however a large playpen/run may also be used. Small spaces are not suitable. A new space avoids the need for the rabbit to defend an established territory. Strange territories often stimulate rabbits to seek reassurance

from one another. During this time supervision is critical as rabbits can be unpredictable and aggressive. Wear protective gloves (leather or gardening style gloves) in case you need to stop any fighting.

Always provide lovely and various food stuffs in the run to encourage the rabbits to eat together, as this is an essential part of the bonding process.

Animals can be held together and petted after a few dates. If heads are lowered in a request for grooming but both rabbits are too stubborn to initiate you can give them both a stroke to help initiate the behavior.

Some people have had success having both rabbits on a harness and leash bonding them visually and slowly building up to some contact however this can alter natural body language between the rabbits and may not be successful due to this.

Ideally the first date should be no longer than 15 minutes. Don't date if you are going to skimp on the supervision, better to miss a date than have a bad encounter. Visits are continued in neutral territory and can be progressively made longer, ideally with twice daily dates from the start and with time building on the length of time and frequency of the dates. **Never** leave rabbits alone unsupervised until they are fully bonded.

WARNING rapid tail chasing, tail raised and ears back means an attack is coming. Immediately separate with a broom or thickly gloved hands, as attacks can cause serious injury to both the humans and the rabbits. No further dating for 2 weeks. Maintain swapping and visual contact (housing). If allowed to escalate it can affect any future pairing as rabbits rarely tolerate bad experiences. Any fighting behaviors have a 2-week break. Try a new larger space when you restart dating.

Speed Dating Method

This method is quicker but supervision and vigilance are needed to assess when problems are occurring and parting rabbits quickly if needed. Rabbits have less time to adjust to the sight and smell of their proposed partner.

Rabbits are introduced without a prolonged period of visual contact. The rest of the dating process is exactly the same. If the rabbits appear unstressed and are not showing aggression, the process can be repeated on numerous occasions for longer periods until bonding is achieved. Always provide lovely and various foodstuffs, eating together is an essential part of bonding.

Stress bonding

Many behaviour texts advocate putting rabbits into stressful situations, such as in a cage together whilst on a car journey, in a cage on top of a running washing machine, in a bath with slippery sides. This technique are based upon rabbits being placed in very stressful situations and taking comfort in each other's presence. It is an attempt to take shortcuts and is **not recommended**. Gentle methods are humane and don't compromise the animals welfare.

Behaviour during bonding

- 🐾 Often rabbits completely ignore each other this is encouraging because some rabbits begin fighting immediately
- 🐾 Mirroring is often seen; rabbits copy the behavior/posture of the other; this is usually a very positive sign
- 🐾 Males will often chase females like they do in the wild however chasing can be by the male or female. This is not usually stressful and is part of establishing the pecking order
- 🐾 They will often run circles around one another in a roundup type of behavior
- 🐾 **TIGHT RUNNING CIRCLES & TAIL CHASING** must be stopped immediately it can lead to full blown conflict and also the other rabbit will recall the bad experience during the next bonding session. **EARS BACK & RAPID TAIL FLICKING** is a warning sign of pending aggression, again separation required

- 🐰 The dominant rabbit in the partnership undertakes mounting behaviour. This is often seen by either sex. If the submissive bunny (one being mounted) is becoming agitated you can break the mount with a loud clap. Only part them if you think a fight is about to happen. After the bond is established mounting behavior will often continue by both rabbits and can also signal affection later into the relationship
- 🐰 Nipping after a mount is normal behaviour and occasionally a tiny amount of fur is pulled off. It can also happen if one of the rabbits is guarding a particular area or resource. This is fine if the other rabbit is ok with it. If things are getting heated a loud clap can be enough to diffuse the situation
- 🐰 Grooming is a very positive sign that bonding is working. Mutual grooming is the single most important sign of a bonded pair
- 🐰 Bunny flops, throwing themselves down on their sides, binkies and tail flicks are all positive signs (tail flicking is flirting not to be confused with the aggressive signs)
- 🐰 Turning their bottoms directly to the other and thumping is a direct cry for attention

Moving in together

Ideally clean the new house out completely and do during the day. Don't ever put one rabbit into the others housing area. Use temporary housing whilst getting one area ready if needed.

