

Litter Box Training Your Rabbit

Rabbits are naturally clean animals who can be trained to use a litter box just like a cat! They typically choose to urinate and defecate in one corner of their enclosures, so training is often as simple as placing a litter box in the corner that they most commonly use. With consistency and patience, you can help your rabbit reliably choose to use their litter boxes, thus increasing their ability to freely roam in more spaces in your home without fear of a mess.



Start with the right litter

Per the House Rabbit Society's recommendations, we would recommend using organic and natural litters made from alfalfa, wheat grass, oat, citrus, paper, or compressed kiln-dried sawdust. Be sure to use a litter specifically made for rabbits, from brands such as Carefresh, Yesterday's News, Oxbow, or Critter Country. Avoid using pine or cedar shavings, litter, or bedding. Under no circumstances should cat litter be used, as it can be incredibly dangerous for rabbits if ingested.

Go slow

Be sure to increase the amount of space that your rabbit has access to in small increments. Start off only allowing them access to their enclosure and an appropriately sized litter box (see recommendations below). Once your rabbit is consistently using their litter box, you can very slowly begin to give them access to additional rooms in your home. If your rabbit begins to have accidents outside of their box, this is a sign that you need to move more slowly or possibly provide an additional litter box. This doesn't mean that your rabbit can't have the opportunity to explore the world outside of their enclosure! Just make sure that they are exploring rabbit-proofed spaces, are supervised, and that you pick up any items that may be attractive options for urinating or defecating (pillows, blankets, or other soft, absorbent surfaces) and that additional litter boxes are provided in the space that they are exploring.

The importance of well-placed hay

A large quantity of your rabbit's defecation will occur while they are eating. It is important to place your rabbit's hay inside of the litter box so that they are comfortably standing or sitting in their box while they eat. You can also use a hay rack right next to the box, but you will need to be sure to place it so that your rabbit can comfortably sit or stand in their litter box while they eat.

Kicking litter out of the box

Rabbits love to dig and some will do so in their boxes, kicking litter out of it. High sided litter boxes can be helpful tools for rabbits who dig in their litter boxes. If your rabbit is an excessive digger, you may consider a plastic storage bin with a hole cut out as a doorway to minimize how much litter they are able to kick out of the box.

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If the rabbit makes a mistake

It is incredibly important to never punish your rabbit for having accidents outside of their litter box. If you witness the accident happening, you can very gently and calmly guide them back to their litter box, but it is more important to consider what you could do to set them up to be more successful going forward.

A word about feces

A healthy rabbit can poop more than 200 times per day, so remember, perfect accuracy may not be realistic and you shouldn't worry about a stray pellet here and there. If it happens, pick it up with a piece of paper towel, toss it, and carry on with your day. It is also normal for rabbits to leave a few pieces of stool along the boundaries of their enclosures to mark them as their own. As this is a socially healthy, normal behavior, it should not be discouraged.

Key factors to consider if you are struggling with litter box training your rabbit

Location of the box

If your rabbit is routinely choosing a spot to urinate or defecate in, it may be simplest to put a litter box there, rather than trying to convince your rabbit not to use that spot at all.

Age

Young rabbits can be much more difficult to litter box train. If your rabbit is under 6 months old, please be patient and consistent – it gets easier with time!

Spay/neuter status

Whether your rabbit is altered makes a huge difference. Sexually mature rabbits will mark their territory, making litter box training much more difficult. If your rabbit is not altered and you are struggling with litter box training, you may want to discuss with your veterinarian whether altering them is appropriate.

Size of the litter box

Your litter box should be large enough that your rabbit can comfortably sit inside along with their hay supply without the sides touching them. If your rabbit's cage cannot accommodate a litter box of that size, your rabbit will need a larger enclosure.

Additional resources:

If you are seeking additional support with your rabbit, please contact our Behavior Line at 414-431-6173 or email asktheexpert@wihumane.org.