

# Litter Training the House Rabbit

Rabbits naturally choose one of a few places (usually corners) to deposit their urine and most of their fecal balls. Therefore training a rabbit to urinate in a litter pan involves little more than placing a pan in the rabbit's chosen corner or latrine. Know that all rabbits will normally drop some fecal balls outside of the litter pan and around their cage to mark their territory. This is not failure to be litter-trained!

## **Does age make a difference?**

Older rabbits are easier to train than younger rabbits, especially babies, since the rabbit's attention span and ability to learn increases as it grows.

## **Does spaying/neutering help?**

Yes! When rabbits reach 4-6 months of age, their reproductive hormones become active and they usually begin marking their territory. Spaying or neutering will make a rabbit more likely to use its litter box, and less likely to want to mark its territory.

## **What types of litter should I use?**

When selecting a litter, keep in mind that rabbit urine has a very strong odor. Most rabbits also spend a great deal of time in their litter pans, and they will normally nibble some of the litter. Select an organic litter such as an oat, citrus or recycled paper product (i.e. CareFRESH, Absorption Corp; Cat Country, Mountain Meadows Products; Cellu-Dri, SSP). Compressed sawdust pellets (i.e. Feline Pine, Church & Dwight Co.) are inexpensive, highly absorbent litters. These sawdust pellets are non-toxic because phenolic compounds are removed during production. Litters made from aspen bark are also safe and good at absorbing odors.

A handful of hay may also be placed in each box, or hay may simply be used as litter although hay obviously must be changed very frequently.

Avoid:

- Litters made from softwoods, like pine or cedar shavings or chips, as these products are thought to cause liver damage when ingested.
- Clay litter is dusty. If your bunny likes to dig, the dust may irritate her respiratory tract and make her vulnerable to respiratory disease. Also the deodorant crystals in some clay litters are toxic
- Clumping litters will clump inside the rabbit's digestive and respiratory tracts causing serious problems and often leading to death. (Clumping litters may enter the respiratory tract if the rabbit creates enough dust to inhale significant amounts).

- Corncob litter is not absorbent and does not control odor. If eaten, corn cob can also, cause a lethal intestinal blockage.

### **Cleaning and Disposal**

Clean litter pans often, to encourage your rabbit to use them. Use white vinegar to rinse boxes out. Let pans soak for tough stains. Clean up accidents outside of the cage with white vinegar or club soda. If the urine has already dried, try a product like "Nature's Miracle" stain and odor removal.

To dispose of organic litters, they can be used as mulch, or can be composted. Rabbit pills can be directly applied to plants as fertilizer.

### **What if the cage is too small for a litter box?**

If your rabbit's cage is too small for a litter pan, you may have a cage that is too small for your rabbit. Even a dwarf rabbit breed should be provided with plenty of space, however a Pyrex baking dish can serve as a good substitute litter pan. A 9 x 9 in (23 x 23 cm) pan is sufficient for a small 3 or 4-pound (1.4-1.8 kg) rabbit.

### **How many litter pans should I offer?**

The more, the merrier, especially if your rabbit is a slow learner, or is especially stubborn about where she wants her box(es) to go. As your rabbit's litter box habits improve, you can decrease the number of litter pans box.

### **Common problems:**

#### *My rabbit kicks litter out of her pan!*

Some rabbits love to kick their litter out of the box. Use of a covered litter box with a hood can help with this problem. You can also experiment with different litters.

#### *My rabbit urinates over the edge of the litter pan!*

Rabbits often back up so far in the litter box that the urine goes over the edge. Potential solutions include:

1. Select a pan with higher sides
2. Use a covered litter box
3. Place a "urine guard" around the back of the cage

### **What should I do if my rabbit starts dribbling urine outside of her litter pan?**

Dribbling urine usually indicates a bladder problem, and a veterinarian should evaluate your rabbit.

Urinating outside of the litter pan may also be associated with any factors that may make your bunny feel “insecure” such as a new pet, house guests, change in cage location, etc. Any of these changes may cause a house rabbit to mark her territory more “enthusiastically”.

### **Reference**

House Rabbit Society. Litter training. Accessed at <http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/litter.html> on March 30, 2011.