

## BONDING BUNNIES

Bringing a new rabbit into a household of an existing rabbit can be like bringing an intruder in from another rabbit warren. The bonding process can be a stressful one for both the people and rabbits involved. Below are a few helpful tips on how to make this introduction as smooth as possible.

- Try to have rabbits of **similar ages or younger** than the existing rabbit. To have the most success all rabbits **must be sterilised**. This helps to decrease the threat on the existing rabbit of the new rabbit coming into their territory.
- In most cases, although there are exceptions to the rule, it is more successful to have a **mixed gender pair** – a male and a female. Usually a rabbit will be more accepting of the opposite sex rabbit and will bond. Males with males and females with females can be more difficult to bond as they often feel the need to constantly compete with each other for resources.
- **Always** introduce new rabbits in a **neutral territory**. Somewhere where both rabbits have **never** been before. This might be a laundry or bathroom or a certain spot in the garden. Decorate this area with lots of **interesting things** like boxes/ tunnels and yummy food items. This will hopefully keep the rabbits interest on these items instead of each other.
- To start off introductions should only be **for 5 – 10 minutes** at a time but repeated regularly throughout the day. As they begin to accept each other the length of time can be extended. Bonding rabbits is a **long process** and can take several weeks.
- Before the rabbits meet **rub** both the rabbit's noses in a **strong smelling** substance. This helps to disguise the individual smells of each rabbit. Some things to use include strong smelling plants like parsley, mint or basil otherwise vanilla or lavender essence also works really well. This can also be rubbed on the fur of the rabbits too if need be.
- Place their individual **hutches next to each other** so that they can get use to each other's smells. While they are living separately you can occasionally **swap over** their litter trays into the opposite rabbits cage or swap the rabbits over to each other's cage so they can accept the new smells as being part of their living environment.
- **Be quick to separate them if they fight**. Rabbit fights can be dangerous so make sure you wear gloves or have a broom close by to separate the rabbits with. If a fight does occur, end the bonding session and try again later. Never leave the rabbits unattended while bonding and always check them over afterwards for any bites or wounds. If a fight does occur rabbits will usually target the genital area, the nose and the ears.
- Unfortunately there are some occasions where rabbits simply **won't bond**. They are all individuals and we can't expect them to get along with all rabbits. If you are trying to bond your rabbits or are thinking of adding another bun to an existing one, always be prepared that bonding may not be successful and that the rabbits may have to live separately.

