
AVIAN & EXOTIC CLINIC

of the Monterey Peninsula

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Litter Box Training Your Rabbit

Why litterbox train your rabbit?

People who are unfamiliar with companion rabbits are often surprised to learn that rabbits can be easily trained to use a litterbox. Altered adult rabbits are naturally fastidious creatures that choose specific places to deposit their urine and most of their droppings. Because of this tendency, most rabbits are quickly litterbox trained. Having your rabbit use a litterbox makes clean up easy, and allows your bunny to come out of confinement and become a full-fledged member of the family.

Spay and neuter for success

Intact adult rabbits use urine as a means of marking their territory. Both male and female rabbits have a strong hormonal need to mark objects such as furniture and personal possessions. Spaying and neutering reduces this behavior and greatly increases your chance of successful litterbox training. Spaying and neutering is best done when your rabbit is young, before it can develop bad habits. You should see an improvement in houstraining within 2-3 weeks of neutering a male rabbit, and within several months of spaying a female rabbit.

Setting up for success

Put a plastic litterbox with rabbit-safe litter in the location(s) that your rabbit already prefers to urinate. Make the litterbox a pleasant place to be, adding hay, veggie treats, or a favorite toy to entice your bunny to spend time there. Pet and talk to your bunny while it is in the box, if these are things that it enjoys. The more time your bunny spends in the litter box, the more accustomed to using it your rabbit will become. If your rabbit has accidents, remember that scolding and punishment don't help. Litterbox training works best if your rabbit associates the litterbox with all things good, not with reprimands.

The best way to prevent accidents is by gradually increasing the size of your bunny's territory. Until it is trained, your rabbit should be confined to its cage or a small room. Once your rabbit is successful using litterboxes in this environment, you can gradually increase its freedom, providing additional litterboxes as needed. Watch your rabbit carefully when it is venturing into larger territory. If it heads to a corner without a litterbox and starts to raise its tail, clap your hands, say "no", and gently guide it to a litterbox. With patience, you too can have a bona fide house rabbit to enjoy sharing your home with.

If extra help is needed

Some rabbits are harder to litterbox train than others. And sometimes there are medical reasons why a rabbit is not using its litterbox. If you have followed the above advice and are still having trouble, or if your bunny's litterbox habits suddenly get worse, please call us at (831) 647-1147 to discuss the problem. Good articles on litterbox training are also available online at www.rabbit.org.