

An Overview of Breeds

There are many different rabbit breeds and a complete description of would be a book in itself. Most people who have had companion rabbits recommend that personality, not breed, be your primary focus when selecting a companion. However, there are some physical characteristics that may play a role in determining the right rabbit for you.

Ears

Some people have a very strong preference for either up-eared rabbits or lop-eared ones. While personality is independent of ear position, the two types of rabbits have different “languages” for communicating with both humans and other rabbits.

I am definitely drawn to lop-eared rabbits, but this preference comes at a price — vet bills! Lops seem to be more susceptible to ear infections, perhaps because the lop ears create a warm, moist environment that encourages growth of bacteria and yeast. Undetected and untreated ear infections can turn into a serious condition called head-tilt or wry neck. If you decide to adopt a lop-eared rabbit, be prepared to keep a close eye on his ears and see your veterinarian at the first sign of scratching or excessive head-shaking!



Size

All baby rabbits start out small but not all breeds remain small. Adult rabbits range in size from 2–20 pounds! Size may be a legitimate factor for some people in choosing a rabbit for their family. Larger breeds are normally a better choice for families with small children since their size alone helps discourage children from trying to lift and carry them. Larger rabbits, however, may require a larger cage or exercise pen, so a smaller rabbit may be a better choice for an all-adult family in a small house or apartment. Remember, though, the smaller the rabbit the more fragile the bones!

Dwarf breeds such as Netherland Dwarf and Dwarf Hotot are the smallest rabbit breeds averaging around 2–3 pounds. Also on the small side are the Jersey Wooly and the Holland and American Fuzzy Lops, averaging around 3–5 pounds. Dutch rabbits range from roughly 3–6 pounds, depending on whether they are dwarf or standard size.

The majority of rabbit breeds fall in the 5–10 pound range. Included in this size range are the **mini-lop** (5–9 pounds) and **mini-rex** (4–6 pounds). Many people expect the “mini” breeds to stay as small as the dwarf breeds. Many of these wonderful creatures end up in shelters because they got “so big,” when, in fact, they are small compared to the full-sized Rex (7–9 pounds) and the giant French and English lops.

French and English lops are among the large breeds with an average size well over 10 pounds. Among the standard up-eared rabbits, most of the really large breeds have appropriate names like Flemish Giant and Checkered Giant. These giant breeds often weigh 15–20 pounds.

One final word of caution: What a pet store tells you about your rabbit’s breed may or may not be accurate. My husband likes to tell the story of the woman who brought her rabbit to an event at a local pet store. She opened the door of her carrier and out came a rabbit nearly as big as the carrier itself. The rabbit was a Flemish Giant — and had been sold to her as a “dwarf.” Fortunately, it didn’t matter to her!



Fur Types

You don't normally see a discussion of fur types in an article about companion rabbits. However, if you are interested in a long-haired rabbit or if someone in your home has allergies, you need to know a little about fur.

Long-haired rabbits such as Angoras, Jersey Woolies, and Fuzzy Lops require **daily** brushing. If you are considering one of these breeds you need to be able to make a regular commitment to spend time grooming them. Skipping even a single day of brushing can result in matted fur that can eventually require trimming by a veterinarian, in extreme cases, under anesthesia. Long-haired breeds are also significantly more sensitive to heat than other rabbits, so a cool, indoor environment year-round is a must!



There are two other “special” types of fur in addition to what I call “standard” rabbit fur:

- **Rex** fur is shorter than standard fur. It is extremely soft, fine, beautiful fur that tends to be more airborne than other furs. When a Rex is shedding you can help remove the fur by brushing, but it rarely stays in the brush — so brushing helps your rabbit but not your environment!



- **Satin** fur is longer (1–1½ inches) and denser than standard fur and has a silky feel to it. Rabbits with this type of fur seem to shed almost constantly and during heavy sheds you can literally “pluck” out handfuls of hair every day. On the positive side, this hair is much less airborne than other types of fur.



People who have a mild allergy to rabbits may be allergic to some rabbits but not to all. My husband falls into that category, as does my veterinarian. If someone in your family has allergies, you may be able to find a rabbit that the sufferer can coexist with simply by exploring the different types of fur.