

Baby or Adult?

There is nothing cuter than a baby rabbit — which is why breeders and pet stores sell so many of them, especially at Easter. Before you give in to temptation, consider whether you are really up to dealing with the “terrible twos” and the “teen years” — all within a six-month period!

Baby rabbits are extremely curious and have boundless energy. They are small and can escape captivity through spaces you swear are too small. Recapture can be difficult, because they move so fast. It is not unusual for a baby rabbit to easily be able to jump on furniture — and from chair to table or desk, making computer equipment and important papers you thought were out of reach “fair game.” Young rabbits just **love** testing out their new equipment (teeth) on woodwork, furniture (both wood and upholstery), remote controls, computer equipment, and so on.

Rabbits go through a major personality change when they reach puberty. The sweet baby rabbit you fell in love with at the pet store may, quite literally, become “the bunny from hell” when hormones kick in. Think about what hormones do to human teenagers and multiply by 1000! While neutering/spaying curbs most socially unacceptable behaviors, there is no guarantee that the adult rabbit will have the **same** personality the baby had. After all, how many humans have the same personality they had as a child?

When you adopt an adult, altered rabbit, the personality you fall in love with is the personality you will take home with you. From that point forward, you control the quality of the rabbit’s life experiences that are most likely to affect how he responds to you. You have a chance to get to know this adult personality, see how he responds to your love, and decide whether this is the right relationship for you — before you make the commitment to adopt.

What you don’t know when you adopt an adult, however, is what “ghosts” he carries with him from his past. Sometimes a sight, sound, or smell from a rabbit’s past will trigger a fear response that we humans don’t understand. Our job as caretakers is not to understand the cause of the fear, but to reassure our rabbit that he is no longer in danger. There is something very special about taking a rabbit who has been neglected or abused, showering him with love, and watching him blossom into a playful, affectionate family member.

Some people want to start with a baby rabbit because they believe they will have more years with him if they start with a baby. Don’t let this logic influence your decision. Remember, there are no guarantees in life. Rabbits can live to be 8–12 years old. However the baby you adopt today may die at age two in spite of all your love and attention. The four-year-old you think is too old for you to adopt may live to be 14!

The final decision — baby or adult — is ultimately yours to make. Remember that starting with a baby bunny is very much like starting with a baby human. You nurture him and watch him grow into the adult he is destined to become — and you need to be able to love him even if he turns out to be very different from what you wanted or expected. Starting with an adult rabbit is more like choosing an adult friend or significant other.