

Adopting from a Shelter or Rescue Group

There are many advantages to adopting a rabbit from a shelter or rescue group. There is nothing more rewarding than taking a rabbit who has been neglected or abused, giving him a second chance in a home filled with unconditional love, and watching him blossom into a playful, affectionate family member. The rabbits in most shelters and foster homes are adults and are already neutered or spayed, which means the rabbit personality you meet and fall in love with is the one you will be adopting. If you are interested in adopting a pair or larger group of rabbits, shelters and rescue groups have volunteers with years of experience bonding rabbits, so you can bring home an already bonded group.

If you don't know of a rescue group in your area, start by contacting shelters. Many shelters do not handle rabbits, but if you are persistent you should be able to find one that either accepts and adopts rabbits or works with a rescue organization that handles rabbits. If you live in a large metropolitan area, you may have several rescue groups to choose from. Different groups have different philosophies and personalities — shop around for the group that you are most comfortable working with.

Most shelters and rescue organizations carefully screen potential adopters. Moving to a new home — even one filled with love — is stressful for a rabbit. Volunteers work hard to ensure that they only adopt rabbits to people who will make a life-long commitment. View your rabbit's adoption as a match-making process where a volunteer will help ensure that you adopt a rabbit that will be happy in your home and that will meet your family's expectations.

When you contact a shelter or rescue organization, be sure to make it clear that you are interested in **adopting** a rabbit. At certain times of the year — when Easter bunnies hit puberty and just before Christmas — these groups may receive ten calls from people trying to place a rabbit for every call from someone wanting to adopt. They should be pleased to hear from you. However, be patient. Rescue groups are volunteer organizations, so it may take a few days for someone to return your call.

At the beginning of each conversation, make sure you note the name of the person you are speaking to. In your initial phone interview, expect to be asked why you are interested in adopting a rabbit and/or why you feel a rabbit would be a good fit for your family. You will probably be asked about your family members, pets, and any previous experience with rabbits. Be prepared to describe where your rabbit will spend most of his time and how much interaction he will have with family members. Please don't be offended by these questions — the volunteer is just trying to ensure that you know what you are getting into. Volunteers should be polite and courteous during the interview — and most will be. However, if you feel you have been treated rudely, call back and ask to speak to a different volunteer or to the leader of the group. If your request is ignored or you continue to be treated rudely, see if there is another rescue group nearby. If you were referred to the group by a shelter, let them know that you contacted the group and were treated rudely.

After the initial interview, the next step is usually to set up an appointment for you to meet

several adoptable rabbits. If you are looking for a specific type of rabbit and the group has none of that type, you may be offered the option of meeting the rabbits they do have — in the hope that you will fall in love with one of them — or having someone contact you when the type of rabbit you are looking for is available.

Don't be surprised if the final step before adoption is a "home visit." If they have the manpower, most shelters and rescue groups like to see where the animals they adopt out will be housed before making the final decision to approve the adoption. This also gives an expert an opportunity to suggest changes to your proposed setup — such as additional bunny-proofing that needs to be done. These suggestions are to protect the welfare of both the rabbit and your possessions!

Remember that shelters and rescue groups do have a right to choose **not** to adopt to you. If this happens, don't take it personally. Because of past experiences, they may have decided not to adopt to families with small children or with cats or dogs. You may be looking for a single bunny and they may be one of the groups who believe **all** rabbits should have rabbit companions. Or you may simply have said something that reminds them of the last person they had a really bad experience with. Again, every group has its own policies and personality. If you want to adopt a rabbit, look for another rescue group or contact the shelters in your area directly.

