

Bunny Proofing Revisited

Once you have your rabbit settled in his new home and have had some time to observe his behavior, you will probably discover additional bunny proofing that needs to be done. This will be an ongoing process for as long as you have your rabbit! The more he makes your home his, the more curious he will become and the more mischief he will get into. My home has many flaws, but each carries with it fond memories of a rabbit, past or present.

The first thing you will want to do is reevaluate the location of cords and toxic houseplants — your rabbit's safety depends on it! As your rabbit feels more at home you may find it necessary to protect more of your possessions from your rabbit.

Plexiglass is a useful item to have on hand. I have had two rabbits who each showed an interest in digging at a particular spot of linoleum (of course, not the same spot). If you observe this behavior, consider covering the spot with a piece of plexiglass anchored with something heavy. You'll be happier if you do this before your rabbit demonstrates that he **can** remove the pattern from the linoleum!

Plexiglass can also be used to help prevent the removal of wallpaper. I have personally only had a problem with wallpaper in places where there is a corner loose. If you do have a spot like this within your rabbit's reach, you'll be happier if you either glue the corner down **securely** or cover the area with plexiglass — or both!

If you don't appreciate the decorating touches your rabbit is adding to your woodwork, clear acrylic corner guards can be purchased at home improvement stores. These can be tacked to baseboards, door jambs, and the bottom of kitchen and bathroom cabinets to protect the wood. They can also be used to protect wallpaper and even the corners of the walls themselves.

Another option for rabbits who chew woodwork or furniture is to use scent or flavor to discourage them. Many people report that the scent of perfume or cologne sprayed on the wood stops a rabbit before he even tries to chew. If someone in your family is allergic to scents, you can try the bitter apple cream or spray available at pet stores. If your rabbit happens to like bitter apple, Tabasco sauce and lemon juice are other flavors to try.

I have heard more than one account of rabbits who have chewed a hole in the drywall of their home or apartment. If your home was built before the mid 1970's, your walls may be painted with a lead-based paint — have the paint tested **before** your rabbit decides to nibble. If your home does contain lead-based paint, consider a cage or exercise pen — or use pens as a barrier to keep your rabbit away from walls.

Carpet samples are another lifesaver and are available at carpet stores, hardware stores, home improvement stores and some grocery stores. If your rabbit has decided to dig or pull on an area of carpet, cover the area with a carpet sample he is allowed to dig in. If possible, anchor the carpet sample with a piece of furniture. This not only keeps your

rabbit from moving the carpet, but also provides the resistance that is part of the fun of tearing up wall-to-wall carpet! Most rabbit just tear at the carpet, but if you think your rabbit is actually eating the carpet fibers substitute grass mats (available at stores like Pier One) in place of carpet samples.



Many rabbits especially love to play under the bed. However, rabbits have been known to chew their way **into** a bed's box springs. This not only causes damage, but also places your rabbit in danger since he has no way of knowing when someone might land on the bed. Monitor your rabbit when he is under your bed and block off access if you suspect he is chewing through the box springs.

One of the best bunny proofing techniques is to block access to the problem area either by restricting access with a gate or exercise pen or by rearranging furniture. Often a temporary change is all that is required — restrict access and refocus your rabbit's attention on more acceptable playthings. In some cases, however, a rabbit will continue to return to the "scene of the crime" for reasons known only to your rabbit. In such cases you need to decide which battles are worth fighting. In our home, the carpet was already 17 years old before the Trio decided to tear it up. While this is not behavior that I encourage — and I do say "No!" and try to refocus attention — I have decided not to restrict my rabbits' access to carpeted rooms. The (formerly good) china cabinet, however, is worth trying to protect from further damage, so I do make an effort to keep my rabbits from chewing on it.

The most important part of bunny proofing is to maintain a sense of humor — and a sense of perspective. Like other pets and children, rabbits are imperfect living creatures. Despite your best efforts to bunny proof, they will, from time to time, do damage to your possessions. Rabbits really don't know the difference between the towel you gave them to play with and the cashmere sweater you carelessly left within reach; or between the sticks you give them for chewing and the dining room table leg; or between the phone book you gave them to destroy and your son's \$100 text book. Unfortunately, you rarely catch the culprit in the act, so it is difficult to even let them know what they have done wrong. Remember that if your rabbit does destroy something it was almost always because you, the human, did an imperfect job of bunny proofing.