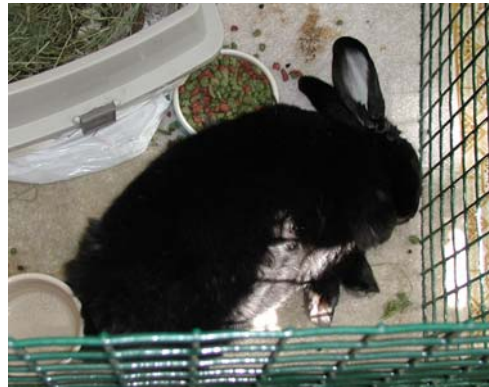


## Exercise Pens

Exercise pens are a good way to give your rabbit more space than a cage while still protecting your furniture and woodwork from his teeth. They can be used instead of a cage, to provide an exercise area in another part of your house, or in conjunction with a cage to give your rabbit more space when he can be supervised. Exercise pens are also useful for creating a confined neutral territory for bonding if you decide to find a companion for your single rabbit. And if you travel with your rabbit, an exercise pen is a must!

Exercise pens can be purchased at many pet supply stores and come in a variety of sizes and heights. Shorter pens are easier for humans to step over, but they are also easier for your rabbit to escape from. My first experience with an exercise pen was the Super Yard, a six-panel pen I purchased at Toys R Us. I had set it up in the garage the winter that Choca Paws and Smokey spent there, and planned to alternate letting them play in it. Smokey had played for about 30 minutes when I decided to let Choca Paws have his turn. I put Choca Paws in the pen and went inside to get a pair of scissors, thinking I would turn the box into a couple of tunnels for them to play in. When I came back to the garage after only two minutes, the pen was empty and Choca Paws was sitting on the other side of the garage, next to my husband's car. After that, I laid some chicken wire across the top of the pen to make sure neither rabbit escaped!

If you have a rabbit with Houdini tendencies, KW Cages sells a wonderful, versatile exercise pen. The green plastic coated pens can be purchased with an optional lid — a wise investment if you have any doubt about your rabbit's ability to escape. Doors can also be put in the pens to allow your rabbit to come out when he pleases. Pens can be placed side-by-side, and doors can allow you to easily have two separate spaces or one larger one.



Your rabbit may decide to tear at the carpet along the edges of his pen. If this happens — or if you want to prevent it from happening — use carpet samples over your carpet and set the pen on them. This is also a good way to protect your carpet from litter-box training accidents. If your rabbit is not yet trained, consider placing one of the heavy plastic chair mats sold in office supply stores over your carpet, then adding carpet samples to give your rabbit a comfortable surface to lie on.

If your rabbit(s) show no interest in escaping, KW pens can be used modularly to create exercise areas to fit almost any need. It is easy to separate and reconnect panels by removing the spiral coils that hold them together. Panels can be used in conjunction with furniture and walls to create room separators. When Chip moved in, I used one of my pens to give her most of the dining room while still allowing Murray access from kitchen to living room through a small portion of the dining room. (Note: We long ago gave up on eating in the dining room.) Chip was, however, confined to a cage at night and

whenever we were not home since she tried several times to climb the pen and actually reached the top at least twice!



Exercise pens can also be used as a protective barrier for precious possessions or simply to protect woodwork and carpet edges from your rabbit's desire to dig and chew. If you use this approach, make sure the pen's edges are securely anchored by furniture and that you have thoroughly blocked access to the far side of the barrier. Plan to spend a few hours with your rabbit in his new environment, surreptitiously observing his behavior and making appropriate adjustments in the barrier's placement. When I first tried this approach with Dante in my study, the goal was to keep him out of the part of the room that was almost impossible to adequately bunny-proof. After setting up the barrier, I left Dante alone for an hour, only to come back and find — you guessed it — Dante was on the wrong side of the barrier. Fortunately, phone, computer, and electric cords were all intact and after a few minor adjustments I never found Dante on the wrong side of the barrier again.

