

The “Gated Community”

Gates provide a very flexible way to share your home with a companion rabbit. Even if your plan is to allow your rabbit access to your entire house, it is always best to start him in a relatively small, preferably uncarpeted area such as a bathroom, laundry room, or small kitchen until he gets used to his new home and litter-box arrangements. Pressure mounted, adjustable gates allow you to gradually expand his space or to vary his freedom depending on which humans are home. You can use them to confine your rabbit to an area or to close off rooms that cannot be adequately bunny-proofed. Fred and Henrietta, who live in my bathroom, are gated in their room at night and when my husband, George, is home (or the last one to leave in the morning). When I’m home alone or when George and I go out together, I gate off our bedrooms and give them access to the carpeted hallway.

Most — though not all — rabbits can be successfully confined to a limited area of your home with one or more baby gates. This approach is psychologically appealing to many people who prefer not to keep a companion animal caged, and the no-cage arrangement encourages you to have more direct contact with your rabbit. A no-cage arrangement can also be very practical physically if your home is like mine and is tight on floor space. It is possible to find room for a litter-box and food bowls in a bathroom or laundry room that could never accommodate a 2’ X 3’ cage!

Gates are available at pet stores, toy stores, and discount stores. They come in a variety of sizes and with a variety of features. Your rabbit’s personality, your home’s design, your family, and your lifestyle will dictate what will and will not work for you. Shop around until you find the features you like.

Some gates must be permanently mounted on your wall or woodwork and swing open and shut (and latch) like a gate. Others are pressure-mounted against the door’s frame every time they are put up — some have easy one-hand release handles, while others require two hands and some coordination to put up and take down. A few of styles can be pressure-mounted at the bottom of the doorway, with a gate that swings open and latches shut.



Most gates fit openings from 26” to 42” and are roughly 24” tall. Wider gates are available, but in limited styles and with limited features. Most of the wider gates I have found do have to be permanently mounted in some way. Taller gates are also available and may be a necessity if your rabbit is a jumper.

Your family’s age, coordination, and agility will help dictate what style of gate you start with. If you live alone and can easily step across a gate, there is probably no need to pay for the one-hand release feature (which does wear out with use) or to mar the wall or woodwork by permanently installing the gate. Gate hopping is actually good exercise for adults and if you have children the gate may be an excellent way to ensure that your child’s playtime with the family rabbit is supervised.

Your rabbit’s personality will also help dictate what type of gate will (and will not) work for you. Not all rabbits will try to jump over a gate. Some will try to chew their way through or around the gate. The first gate I owned lasted 3 years with Smokey. It pressure mounted to the doorway at both the top and the bottom and Smokey was so well behaved that I only anchored it at the top. After his death, when I adopted the Trio, Goldie and Murray quickly learned to work together allowing Murray to escape. After finding Murray on the wrong side of the gate many times, I finally witnessed Goldie pushing the gate forward and holding it while Murray ran through! I thought I could easily solve the problem by anchoring the bottom as well, but Murray quickly proved me wrong by chewing the rubber mounts at the bottom, again allowing the gate to swing freely.

My next gate was the one-hand release style, with the pressure mounts completely inaccessible to Murray’s teeth. Still determined to escape, Murray began chewing through the plastic gate itself. This time it was Goldie (who was significantly smaller than Murray) who began appearing on the wrong side of the gate. My husband, who walks with a cane, found this style of gate so convenient that we bought a few spares and simply replaced the gate when Goldie was able to get through the hole. Since her death, Murray still chews, but much less — perhaps because I am now trained to take the gate down when I hear him start to chew! If you are handy, chewed gates can sometimes be “repaired” with a staple gun and wire. Or you may be able to cover the gate with cardboard or a towel and secure it at the bottom.

There are some gates that are made of wood frames with crossed pieces of wire between them. Some people swear by these since rabbits cannot chew through the wire — although a determined rabbit might be able to destroy the frame. The ones I have seen are just “basic” gates with none of the one-hand release or walk-through features.