

## The Basics of Training

People who are unfamiliar with the concept of companion rabbits are often surprised to learn that rabbits can be trained to use a litter-box. Actually, this training is relatively easy. Altered, adult rabbits usually choose a specific corner of their cage or other space to designate as their bathroom. Litter-box training is often as easy as simply placing the litter-box there.

Rabbits adopted from a shelter or rescue group are often already litter-box trained. Expect them to need some amount of retraining in their new surroundings. Even if your plan is to give your new companion full run of your house or apartment, it is best to start your rabbit out in a relatively small area. Too much freedom too quickly can be overwhelming and can lead to poor litter-box habits.

If your rabbit is already litter-box trained, start with the same type of litter-box and litter that he is used to — even if you plan to ultimately use something different. Place the litter-box in a corner of his cage, exercise area, or room. Rabbits have very definite opinions about how their living space should be arranged. If your rabbit chooses a different corner, it is much easier to move the litter-box than it is to change his mind about where it should be!

Once your rabbit becomes dependable about using the litter-box in his area, you can gradually expand his play area. Usually he will return to his cage or room to use the litter-box. Sometimes he will choose a spot in his expanded area to use as a “second bathroom.” If this happens, consider putting a litter-box there as well.

It is best if you can allow your rabbit to move freely between his cage or room and his expanded play area. However, this is not always practical. If you have to carry your rabbit to his play area — or if you are moving your rabbit to a new living area — he may initially be reluctant to use the litter-box, preferring to wait until he is back in his own space. When I brought Stormy home from the shelter, he worried me because he produced **nothing** for a couple of days. Finally, he chose a spot in my hallway rather than the litter-box in my bathroom. I was so thrilled to see normal



bodily functions, I put an identical litter-box in the spot he had chosen. Because he spent the night and much of the day confined to the bathroom, he began using the litter-box in there as well. Gradually he became used to using it and in a few weeks we were able to remove the litter-box from the hallway.

As I mentioned earlier, rabbits seem to have definite opinions about where their litter-box should be placed. While most prefer a corner of their area, this is not true for all. Dante would always move his litter-box to roughly the middle of his pen. Many rabbits who move the litter-box will proceed to urinate in the corner where it once was. In these cases you will want to find a way to anchor the litter-box in place, usually by clamping it to the side of the cage or pen. For rabbits whose area is a room, it may take some creativity to find a way to keep him from moving the litter-box. In Dante's case, however, it was not necessary to anchor the litter-box. He is excellent about using it — he just wants to exercise his right to move it to the middle of his area!

