

Making a Difference

Educating the general public is the key to solving the problem of unwanted rabbits. Each of us who has companion rabbits can play a key role in educating the general public about rabbits. We each have opportunities to educate every day that we come in contact with other people. Some easy places to strike up conversations — and “conversation starters” — include:

- Grocery store (cart full of produce)
- Pet (supply) store (cart with litter and rabbit food or toys)
- Vet (your rabbit himself)
- Office (rabbit calendar or screen saver and, of course, photos of your rabbit)
- Public and social functions (clothing or accessories)



Take advantage of every conversational opening and offer as much concise, pertinent information as you can in the time you have. This is a great way to let the general public know that rabbits make wonderful companions **and** that after Easter many rabbits end up in shelters.

At the Grocery Store

The produce aisle and checkout lanes at your grocery store are great places to offer education. When you have six or more rabbits (as I do), strangers often start conversations when they see the



shopping cart full of “greens.” Some sample conversations:

- “You must be making a **big** salad!” “I have rabbits.”
- “Wow, what are you cooking?” “Oh, this is for my rabbits.”
- “What do you **do** with kale?” “My rabbits love it. Each rabbit has a favorite variety.”

Responses vary. If someone says “Oh, do you breed?” my response is “No, I rescue. All my rabbits came from a shelter or rescue group.” Many people are unaware that shelters get rabbits or that rescue groups are needed. If someone says “I’ve heard they can be trained to use a litter-box” I say “Yes, all of mine are litter-box trained. They make wonderful companions if you have a fairly quiet household.” If someone says “I hear they are easy to take care of” I respond “Actually, they are more work than a cat or dog — but definitely worth it!”

Another avenue for education at the grocery store is to let the checkout clerks, sackers, and produce manager know you are shopping for your rabbits. I’ll never forget the “Is this woman crazy?” look I got the first time I checked out at the local organic foods store. “Oh, you must be making juice!” the clerk said confidently. “No,” I replied, “I’m feeding my rabbits.” Now, however, this same clerk always asks “How are the bunnies?” The sackers also regularly ask about my rabbits and are quick to inform new employees that I’m “the bunny lady.” These questions from employees often lead to conversations with other customers — and another chance to educate. Occasionally another regular customer will leave her carrot tops (Murray’s favorite!) “in case the bunny lady comes in.”

At the Pet (Supply) Store

Pet supply stores are another great place to provide information. I always pick up the litter first, then spend some time in the aisle with rabbit food and toys. Here I make a real effort to strike up a conversation with other customers who are looking at rabbit food and supplies. I usually start by asking “Oh, do you have a rabbit?” If they do, I ask questions to get them talking about their rabbit, then try to steer them toward healthy food, litter, and treats. If they say “No, but we’re thinking about getting one.” I tell them the litter in my basket is for my rabbits. I then say something like “They can be expensive and a lot of work, but I wouldn’t trade them for anything in the world!” If they have questions, I make every effort to answer them honestly and concisely. Finally, I urge them to adopt from the shelter if they



decide to add a rabbit to their family.

At the Vet

Many people in the vet's waiting room are surprised to learn that I have rabbits rather than cats in my pet carriers. Because we are both at the vet's office, the other person often quickly accepts the concept of rabbits as companion animals and begins asking questions that allow me to address many of the myths about rabbits: They're not good "starter" pets for children — they are more work than a cat or dog. They don't do well in an outdoor hutch — they are very sociable and do best indoors as part of the family. It's not easier to start with a baby — it is better to adopt an adult whose personality is already established. They're not low-maintenance animals — Murray has a regular weekly appointment here (no, I'm not kidding).

At the Office

Your workplace offers a great opportunity for longer, in-depth conversations about companion rabbits. Here, conversation starters include wall calendars, a screen-saver for your computer, and, of course, pictures of your furry family. Make sure your pictures clearly show your rabbit indoors as an integral part of your family. You'll be surprised how quickly you become known as the company's "rabbit expert." If your company has a newsletter, ask if they would include an article in the Spring issue that discourages the purchase of live Easter rabbits. If possible, write the article yourself and include anecdotes about your house rabbits.



Public and Social Functions

Whether you're going to a sports event or a formal dinner, your clothing or accessories can spark a conversation about companion rabbits. For casual events, nothing beats a t-shirt from one of the Rabbit Rescue groups. At everything from art fairs to antique shows to sporting events, people have started conversations with me based on such shirts.

More formal occasions require a bit more creativity. Accessories such as a rabbit tapestry handbag, a rabbit barrette, or a tasteful piece of rabbit jewelry can often lead into conversations about your companion rabbit. Art fairs are a great place to find someone who can make a special piece based on **your** rabbit — I've commissioned some really nice pieces for as little as \$25! Of course more expensive custom pieces are available, as are rabbits in fine jewelry.



Use Your Imagination

The above examples are by no means a comprehensive list. They are intended to spark each person's imagination, inspiring each of you to make a difference wherever you can. If you are comfortable with public speaking, look for opportunities to speak about rabbits. Consider church groups, schools (classrooms or PTA meetings), company functions, and service organizations.

Never underestimate the impact of your conversations with a stranger. The person you spoke to at the grocery store or vet last fall may remember your conversation — and speak up — in a conversation with someone who is considering buying an Easter bunny. If, directly or indirectly, you discourage one family from "getting a rabbit" as a pet for their child, steer one rabbit owner away from dangerous food or litter, or inspire one person to adopt from the shelter, you will have made a difference!

