

Supplies

There are many options for both litter-boxes and litters available on the market today. Based on my personal experience, what works well for one rabbit may be a disaster for a different rabbit. What works best for you will be a function of your rabbit's preferences and your physical and financial limitations. Start simple and let your rabbit lead the way.

Litter-box supplies may include the following:

- Litter-box (required)
- Litter-box liners (optional)
- Newspaper (recommended)
- Litter (optional)
- Hay (recommended)

If you are new to rabbits, this last item may seem strange but it is often the key to improving litter-box habits and encouraging your rabbit to eat more hay. Since rabbits tend to poop while they are eating and like to nibble on what is in their litter-box, a generous handful of hay in the litter-box is the perfect solution for many rabbits.

Litter-boxes

Litter-boxes come in a variety of sizes and shapes and with a variety of options to help address different training problems. The standard rectangular litter-box is a good starting point for most rabbits. The size you choose will be a function of the space available in your rabbit's cage, condo, or room and your rabbit's size. For small breeds, the medium box may be big enough. The large size litter-box works best for rabbits from five to ten pounds. The extra-large or giant size is recommended for the largest breeds. Smaller breeds may do better with a shallower litter-box that is easier for them to hop in and out of while larger breeds may do better with a deeper box. Rubbermaid dishpans can also be used as litter-boxes and come in a variety of sizes.



If your rabbit seems to kick a lot of litter out of his box, start by adding a snap-on frame to the box. This makes the box a bit taller to hop in and out of, but often solves the

problem of inadvertently kicking litter (and poop) out of the box. You can also try switching to a different type of litter. If all else fails, you may want to try one of the hooded (enclosed) litter-boxes. However, some rabbits will not use this type of box, perhaps out of fear of being “trapped in a corner.” A more enclosed litter-box also tends to trap odor and will probably need to be cleaned more frequently.

A second common problem with the simple rectangular litter-box is that your rabbit may back up so far that he urinates over the edge of the litter-box. A deeper litter-box, with or without a snap-on frame, will often solve this problem. If your rabbit has difficulty getting into a deeper — or framed — litter-box, high-backed litter-boxes are available in both corner (triangular) styles and standard (rectangular) styles. These boxes also feature a very low entryway on the opposite side, making them ideal for rabbits with mobility problems and for use after surgery.

A third, less common, problem is the rabbit who intentionally digs all the litter out of his box. Some rabbits will then urinate in the empty box, getting both feet and tail urine-soaked. For these rabbits, you can place a piece of hardware cloth, cut to litter-box size, on top of the litter. Or you can purchase a “sifting” litter-box, line the solid portion with newspaper and litter and place the grated portion on top of the litter. Both of these approaches allow urine and some poops to pass through to the litter and keep your rabbit from making as much of a mess.

Litter-Box Liners

If you are willing to spend the money and if your rabbit doesn't chew them, litter-box liners can go a long way toward making litter-box cleaning quick and easy. These are available in basically the same sizes as the standard, rectangular litter-boxes, and you will be happier if you choose the right size for your litter-box. Like trash bags, they come in plain and drawstring styles. Drawstring bags fit quite snugly and you may have to work to get excess air from between the bag and the litter-box. These work well in a basic litter-box, either with or without a snap-on frame. Because of the drawstring bag's snug fit, I have found that the plain bags work better if you use a grated piece to keep your rabbit away from the litter.

If you try using litter-box liners, watch carefully to be sure your rabbit is not eating the plastic liner. If you actually see him eating the plastic, discontinue using the liners immediately. If he simply tears a hole or two in the plastic, it won't harm him, but you may find it defeats the purpose of using a liner.

Newspaper

For **most** rabbits, I recommend using a layer of newspaper between the litter-box (or box liner) and the litter itself. The exception would be a rabbit who insists on shredding the soiled newspaper and tossing it outside the box!

Newspaper is both inexpensive and absorbent and can help reduce the amount of litter you need to use. If you don't take a newspaper, you probably have a friend or neighbor

who would be happy to let you dispose of his papers! If you are willing to change the litter-box more frequently, you may be able to get by with newspaper alone with no need to purchase — and dispose of — expensive and often heavy litters.

Choosing a Litter

There are many types of litter available. **For your rabbit's health and safety, please avoid the following types of litter:**

- **Clumping litters.** If you have a rabbit in your house, please avoid clumping litters in **all** litter-boxes (including your cat's) that your rabbit might have access to. If your rabbit nibbles this type of litter, it is likely to clump in his digestive tract, causing an obstruction, which can lead to death.
- **Pine and cedar shavings.** The fumes from pine and cedar shavings have been linked to both respiratory problems and liver damage in rabbits and other small mammals who use them as litter or bedding.
- **Cat Works Litter.** CatWorks has been linked to zinc poisoning in rabbits. It is made primarily from grain milling products, which makes it seem edible to rabbits. Unfortunately, it also contains enough zinc oxide to make it toxic. Like many other litters, it is fine for cats who do not eat it but deadly for rabbits who might.
- **Corn Cob Litter.** This type of litter is absorbent but not especially good at controlling odor. Like clumping litter, if your rabbit nibbles on it, corn cob litter can cause a lethal blockage.
- **Clay Litters.** Clay litters should be avoided **unless** you use a grated litter-box that prevents your rabbit from digging in the litter itself. Clay litters are extremely dusty, and the dust can cause respiratory problems. The deodorant crystals found in many clay litters are also toxic.

There are many rabbit-safe alternatives to choose from. You may not be able to find all options in all parts of the country. However, you should be able to find one that fits your budget, life-style, and physical limitations. Some of the most popular options include:

- **Paper Pulp or Recycled Newspaper Litters.** Paper-pulp products (CAREfresh) and recycled newspaper litters (Yesterday's News, EcoFresh) are absorbent and control odor well. They are safe if ingested (in reasonable quantities). Pulp products are light in weight, which is an advantage to human caretakers who have difficulty handling heavy bags of litter and equally heavy bags of trash. However, they are easier for your rabbit to kick out of the litter-box and more likely to stick (temporarily) to your rabbit's fur. I have found that a 50/50 mix of these two types of product works well for some rabbits. For maximum benefit, put a layer of the lighter litter **under** a layer of the heavier litter.

- **Compressed Sawdust Pellets.** Wood stove pellets, available in many parts of the country for winter heating, make an economical, alternative to litters like Yesterday's News. If wood stove pellets are not available where you live, Feline Pine litter is a similar product. Both are absorbent and control odor well. Even though these products contain both softwood and hardwood sawdust, they are rabbit-safe because the toxic chemicals are removed by the manufacturing process. For those of us who are small in stature, the main disadvantage to wood stove pellets is that they are often sold only in 40 lb. (or larger) bags.
- **Pelleted Plant Fiber Litter.** Cat Country is a pelleted litter made primarily from plant fibers. It is absorbent and controls odor well.
- **Aspen.** Aspen litter comes in both a pelleted form (Aspen Supreme) and a shaved wood product that looks similar to pine and cedar bedding but is safe for rabbits. These litters are absorbent and control odors well. If you find the shaved wood version sticking to fur and being tracked around the house, consider mixing it with a pellet litter.
- **Food Pellets.** Some people use food pellets as litter. They control odor relatively well and are certainly safe for your rabbit to eat, though they may not be the best choice for an overweight rabbit. They do not absorb urine as quickly as most litters, but do absorb eventually. Finally, it is critical that wet pellets not be allowed to mold, since mold is extremely toxic to rabbits.
- **Newspaper and/or Shredded Paper.** Newspaper and/or shredded paper an economical alternative to purchased litters. They are absorbent but do little to control odor, so boxes need to be changed more frequently than with other litters. If you like the idea of shredded paper, you may be able to get an ample supply from your employer. If he has any concerns about the "security risk" of sending the shredded paper home with you, remind him that you will be **adding** security since **no one** is going to attempt to reassemble it once your rabbits have used it!

When buying litter, I avoid purchasing products that are scented (at one time Yesterdays News came in both scented and unscented varieties). Rabbits have an acute sense of smell and you certainly don't want your rabbit to avoid the litter-box because he objects to the scent of the litter.

Hay

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, I highly recommend adding a generous handful of hay to your rabbit's litter-box. Hay in the litter-box encourages two good habits — using the litter-box and eating hay. If the litter-box is large enough, your rabbit uses only one corner for a bathroom, and you keep a supply of fresh, dry hay in the box, this may be the only place your rabbit **wants** to go to eat hay! If your rabbit insists on

urinating on the hay, see if you can find a way to hang a hay manger so it can be reached while he is in the litter-box.

Litter-box Cleaning

You and your rabbit will need to negotiate how often his litter-box should be cleaned. Some rabbits like immaculate litter-boxes and would love it if you cleaned after every use. Others may be confused if you change it too often. Urine and poop in the litter-box encourage some rabbits to use it again. If you change it too frequently, it may give them the impression that they are not **supposed** to use it!

If you do not use litter-box liners, you will need to thoroughly clean the litter-box periodically. Plain vinegar is excellent for removing both odor and stains. Some people rinse the litter-box each time they change it while others do “heavy-duty” cleaning on a weekly basis. Again, you and your rabbit will need to negotiate a schedule that works for you.

