



Rabbit Reproduction 101

The female rabbit (doe) does not come into heat (oestrus) as do other animals. The doe will accept the male (buck) at any time of the year.

When can Pet Rabbits Be Bred?

The proper age of bucks and does for the first mating depends upon the breed and individual development. Small breeds develop more rapidly and are sexually mature at a younger age than medium and large breeds.

Some individual rabbits within a breed will develop more rapidly than others. Generally, the smaller breeds can be mated when the bucks and does are 4 to 5 months old, the medium breeds at 5 to 6 months, and the larger breeds at 9 to 12 months.

Mate does when they reach maturity. If mating is delayed too long, breeding difficulties may occur.

Does can continue to have young for up to 4 years.

How long are Pet Rabbits Pregnant?

The gestation period of pet rabbits, or the period from mating to kindling, is 31 or 32 days.

Some litters may be kindled as early as the 29th day or as late as the 35th day, but 98 percent of the normal litters will be kindled between the 30th and 33rd day.

The length of pregnancy in the rabbit is 31 days and the doe can produce from 1 to 12 young each time she gives birth. She can become pregnant again within a few days of giving birth. However it is not good practice to allow the doe to become pregnant straight after giving birth. It is better to mate the doe when her young (litter) are 4 weeks old so that they are 8 weeks old when the next litter is born. In this way one doe can produce 6 litters a year.

How to tell if Pet Rabbits are ready for breeding

A doe shows signs of being ready for mating by restlessness and nervousness by rubbing her chin on feeding and watering equipment, and by attempting to join other rabbits in nearby hutches.

When the doe is ready, always take the doe to the buck's hutch for mating. Mating should occur almost immediately after placing the doe in the cage. When mating is completed, return the doe to her own hutch. Record the date of service.

One buck in good health can service 10 does, and can be used several times a day for short periods.

How can you tell if a doe is pregnant?

Test mating, returning the doe to the buck periodically, is not an accurate determination of a pregnant doe. Some does will still accept a buck even when pregnant.

Two weeks after mating you can feel the young through the under side of the doe's belly. If the doe is pregnant, you should be able to distinguish the embryos as marble shaped forms as they slip between the thumb and fingers of your hand.

What to do if a doe is pregnant?

27 days after mating, put a nest box in the hutch. The doe will start to pull fur from her body to line the nest. The doe usually will consume less feed during this time. Give her small amounts of green feed.

After kindling, sometimes a doe may be restless. Do not disturb her until she has quieted down.

Do not check the young until the day after birth and do not touch them with your hand. Use a stick to gently touch them when checking and remove any that are dead. They are blind until the eyes open at 10 days of age.

Leave the young rabbits with the mother

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