

Rabbit Handbook

Raising rabbits is fun. At the same time, a 4-H Rabbit Project can provide an important life skill learning experience. Rabbits require no fancy or expensive equipment: They can be confined to hutches, and can be raised in urban as well as rural areas. They also can help you learn animal husbandry, or the proper care and management of animals. Those who work with rabbits find that something different is always happening. You will find that handling rabbits, and their response and dependence on you, are rewarding. Caring for and managing your rabbits provides new experiences each day. Possibly the greatest thrill is when you share your experiences with friends and neighbors.

Before you launch into a rabbit project, take some time to decide if it is right for you. Calculate whether you have time and money to care for your project, and decide if dogs, cats, and other animals in the area would be harmful to your rabbits. Ask your neighbors if they object to your raising rabbits as a 4-H Project. If you live in an incorporated area, check city ordinances also, to see if it is legal to raise rabbits in your area.

If conditions are right for a rabbit project, you can look for a suitable place to keep your rabbits and arrange for proper hutches and equipment.

Your Rabbit Project

Your 4-H Rabbit Project will give you:

- T** Opportunities to share with friends in a 4-H Club.
- T** Fun and learning activities with other 4-H members.
- T** Help in developing leadership and communication skills.
- T** Opportunities to learn about animals' behavior, how they live and reproduce.
- T** Help in developing patience, understanding and concern for living creatures.
- T** Experiences that teach you about animal science, feed and nutrition, animal health and disease control.
- T** Help in developing responsibility. Your rabbits will depend on you for their care and comfort.
- T** An opportunity to keep records and manage a business of your own.
- T** Experience in raising and caring for rabbits.

Project Options

You can participate in the Texas 4-H Rabbit Project through a variety of options, depending on the intended use of your project.

Market Rabbit Project: In this project, you own one or more does (a doe is a female rabbit; a buck is a male) and an appropriate number of bucks (generally, one buck for every eight to 10 does). One or more litters are raised and marketed for meat. Members may have crossbred or standardized breeds. Members must provide for proper housing, feed and care of animals.

Rabbit Breeding Project: In this project, you own one or more does and an appropriate number of bucks. One or more litters are raised. Offspring are sold for breed stock and show animals. Members should also market the young. Members are encouraged to use pure-bred commercial breeds for this project, although crossbred rabbits are acceptable. Members must house, feed and care for animals properly.

Pet Project: In this project, you own one rabbit (buck or doe) as a pet. Members house, feed and care for the animal properly. Even members without a rabbit can learn about rabbits and their care and share experiences through club meetings, tours, presentations, research projects, judging and identification activities, and sharing with other members.

An early step in the project is choosing the type of rabbit to raise. Rabbit breeds are differentiated by their body type, while varieties are distinguished by the color of the rabbits' fur.

Domestic rabbits are divided according to size into four basic groups: "small" breeds, "medium" breeds, "large" breeds and "giant" breeds. Choose the breed based on your purpose for raising the rabbits and the amount of space you have available for them.

It is best to start with a breed you like and that is raised by someone near you, if at all possible. This gives you the advantage of that person's experience and knowledge if you have questions about the breed.

Also, it is usually better to start with a breed that is a solid color, as raising a marked breed (multicolor) can sometimes be difficult and frustrating. After you are familiar with the general aspects of rabbit raising, you can move to a more challenging breed.

When possible, it is best to buy rabbits from established, reliable breeders. These are people who have healthy rabbits, are respected by other breeders, keep good records, and generally have good reputations as rabbit breeders and raisers.