

Rabbit Handbook

Breeding and Kindling

The age of bucks and does for first mating depends on the animal's breed and development. Generally, smaller breeds (up to 8 pounds) can be mated at 5 to 6 months old. Medium breeds, such as the White or Red New Zealand, can be mated at 6 1/2 to 7 months; and giant breeds at 8 to 9 months. Growth is more important than age, but it is a mistake to mate rabbits much younger than the ages listed, regardless of size.

After the first litter, the doe can be bred again when the litter is 7 weeks old. If the doe refuses the buck, try again in 3 days. After mating, the doe should be test-mated on the 18th day. Refusal of the buck, whining and attempts to escape indicate that she is bred.

Always take the doe to the buck's hatch. Mating should occur at once. Allow the buck to service the doe only twice. A second mating in 6 hours may increase the size of the litter. If service is effective, the buck will fall to one side. Do not use bucks more than once every 3 days. However, daily breeding for short periods is satisfactory.

Over-Breeding

A doe should produce only four litters per year. Do not allow her to raise more than eight young in each litter.

Breeding Failures

Most failures to breed are caused by does being too fat. Excessive heat, especially during the summer, will make bucks sterile.

Sometimes does eat the young, for a variety of reasons. If the doe receives a wholesome, well-balanced feed, but still eats her young, it is best not to keep her for a breeder.

Kindling (giving birth to young)

About 25 to 28 days after a doe has been bred, put the nest box in her hutch. Fill the box with 4 or 5 inches of clean straw. Keep the doe quiet. Loud noises often cause a doe to miscarry.

Young are usually born between the 28th and the 32nd day. Gently check the new babies and remove dead ones after the doe has kindled. A doe will cover the young with fur from her body.

The doe is the best caretaker of her young. Each day during the summer after she has kindled, attract her attention with some feed or by stroking her with one hand. Use the other hand to examine the nest and take out any dead young. It is also advisable to remove all but seven or eight. If the doe nourishes too many young, runts and weaklings result. Surplus young may be moved to does with small litters of equal size and age.

Just before kindling, the doe may eat little. Be sure she has plenty of fresh water. After she kindles, feed enough to supply necessary nourishment for her and milk for the young. In addition to more of the regular ration, feeding carrots, rolled oats or Calf Manna is beneficial.

Nursing

The doe enters the box to feed the young for about 1 minute early in the morning and again late in the evening. Well-fed babies are sleek, clean, fat and well-filled most of the time. Have no fear that they are starving; most rabbits are excellent mothers. Young rabbits are about 10 to 12 days old when their eyes open and fur appears.

Weaning

When rabbits are about 3 weeks old, they leave the box and eat with their mother. Do not wean until the young are 8 to 10 weeks old. They should be butchered immediately. Prospective breeders can be left with the doe a few days, although it is unnecessary beyond 10 weeks. The doe can be rebred a week before weaning the litter.

