

THE
WORLD
OF

Rabbit Toys

Rabbit toys are for more than just **spoiling your bunny** — they offer several vital benefits for your furry friend.

By Patricia Knight



MOST PEOPLE WHO CARE FOR RABBITS ARE FAMILIAR with wood chews — but there are other toys, too, and a lot of them. They can be made of wood, willow and cardboard, just to name a few materials. **There are toys rabbits can chew, toss and roll, along with hanging toys and toys with bells — the list goes on.**

Rabbit toys are not just gimmicks or for those who spoil their rabbits. Your bunny will benefit from toys that are right for him or her, because just like dogs and cats, rabbits have distinct personalities and preferences. A toy that causes one bunny to leap about and binky (a rabbit jump of joy) may be ignored by another. It's worth it to find toys that suit your rabbit.

More Than Just Playthings

Two obvious benefits to rabbit toys are dealing with chewing needs as well as boredom.

Linda Cope, marketing manager at Marshall Pet Products, said that toys are important to keep rabbits from

chewing on, for example, the leg of your chair.

"It's important to have toys for them to distract them, and it also helps keep their teeth in good health."

Caroline Charland, owner of *BunnyBunchBoutique.com* and founder of the Bunny Bunch Rabbit Rescue, also stressed this importance. "Because their teeth continually grow, they need to



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DUTCH/DANIEL JOHNSON

Toys can prevent rabbits from getting bored and distract a rabbit from chewing on furniture or molding.

AVOIDING A SCARE

chew on things to keep them trim," she said, noting that rabbits enjoy fun activities, as well.

Boredom can also lead to additional destructive behaviors, such as demolishing their own home (hutches, etc.). Heather Cappel, creative coordinator at Ware Manufacturing Inc., noted that a rabbit that is bored will scratch or chew on his cage or hutch, as well as accessories and feeders. "By offering them appropriate toys, you can extend the life of the pet's habitat," she said.

Bearing all this in mind, rabbit owners should offer toys to prevent bad behaviors from ever happening. "I gave them toys right away to avoid bad behavior in the first place," said rabbit owner Alison Giese of California. "It is helpful for them to have toys to chew on and keep them from getting bored so that they don't find ways to entertain themselves at the cost of your furniture and baseboards."

A rabbit owner in Michigan named David Luther echoed this thought, as he has discovered that toys decrease the instances of chewed-up furniture. "Without a wood toy, we find the rabbits gnaw on our antique wood trim and French doors, so we make sure they always have

Some rabbits do not seem scared of anything! Keep in mind, though, that any animal can be frightened by something new (whether a toy or other newly encountered object). One factor that may become a scare for some rabbits is noise. There are reports of rabbits that enjoy a toy ball with bells inside or toys that rattle; on the other hand, those same rabbit owners report having particular bunnies that are frightened by these noises. When first introducing a new toy, make sure to stick around and observe whether your bunny is frightened of the new addition.

toys available," he said.

Toys are helpful even for rabbits whose behaviors are past the point of prevention and have become tough cases. Gretta Parker of West Virginia runs a rabbit toy drive called Toys For Hops, so she knows the important role toys have for bunnies.

She describes a former troublemaking rabbit named Stanley that was at first aggressive and even a biter. However, once Stanley was given a toy he loved, his behavior improved.

"He has been with us six months," Parker said. "His aggression issues are almost non-existent, and he has even bonded with another rabbit."

So, what kind of toys benefit a rabbit like Stanley? Not surprisingly, Parker said she gets him toys that help him work off his excessive energy.

Materials & Safety

Various materials comprise bunny toys, but no matter what type of toy you offer your rabbit, the toy needs to be safe. Natural materials are especially popular. Cappel said wood and safe natural grasses are two good choices.

"These materials are relatively durable and offer natural

In addition to providing toys, switch them out so that your rabbits won't get bored, and don't forget to play with your rabbit every day.

textures that are easy for rabbits to grip."

Other popular materials include willow, cardboard, corn husk, apple branches and more. Be aware that not all natural items are safe — not even all types of wood — so please do not simply go out and grab some "toy" from the outdoors, thinking it will be safe for your bunny.

As far as manufactured toys go, Charland offered some sound advice: "Be very careful and make sure you get your rabbit toys and chews from a reliable source. Soft plastic or any manmade materials can be deadly if ingested."

Toyland For Rabbits

If you're interested in offering your bunny some new playthings, your rabbit is in for a treat. A lot of toys are available, and just about all of them benefit your rabbit's physical and/or mental well-being. Consider some of these commonly available toys for your rabbit.

Tunnels: Because rabbits live in burrows in the wild, tunnels mimic this natural environment. What seems like a dark, claustrophobic cylinder to a person is a more



MAN: PEX/DANIEL JOHNSON

natural habitat for a rabbit. Toy tunnels can be made of anything from soft materials to willow and are some of the most popular rabbit toys out there. Meandering through the tunnel is just one way a rabbit can have fun with it.

Cyndi Ringoot of California and her daughter have

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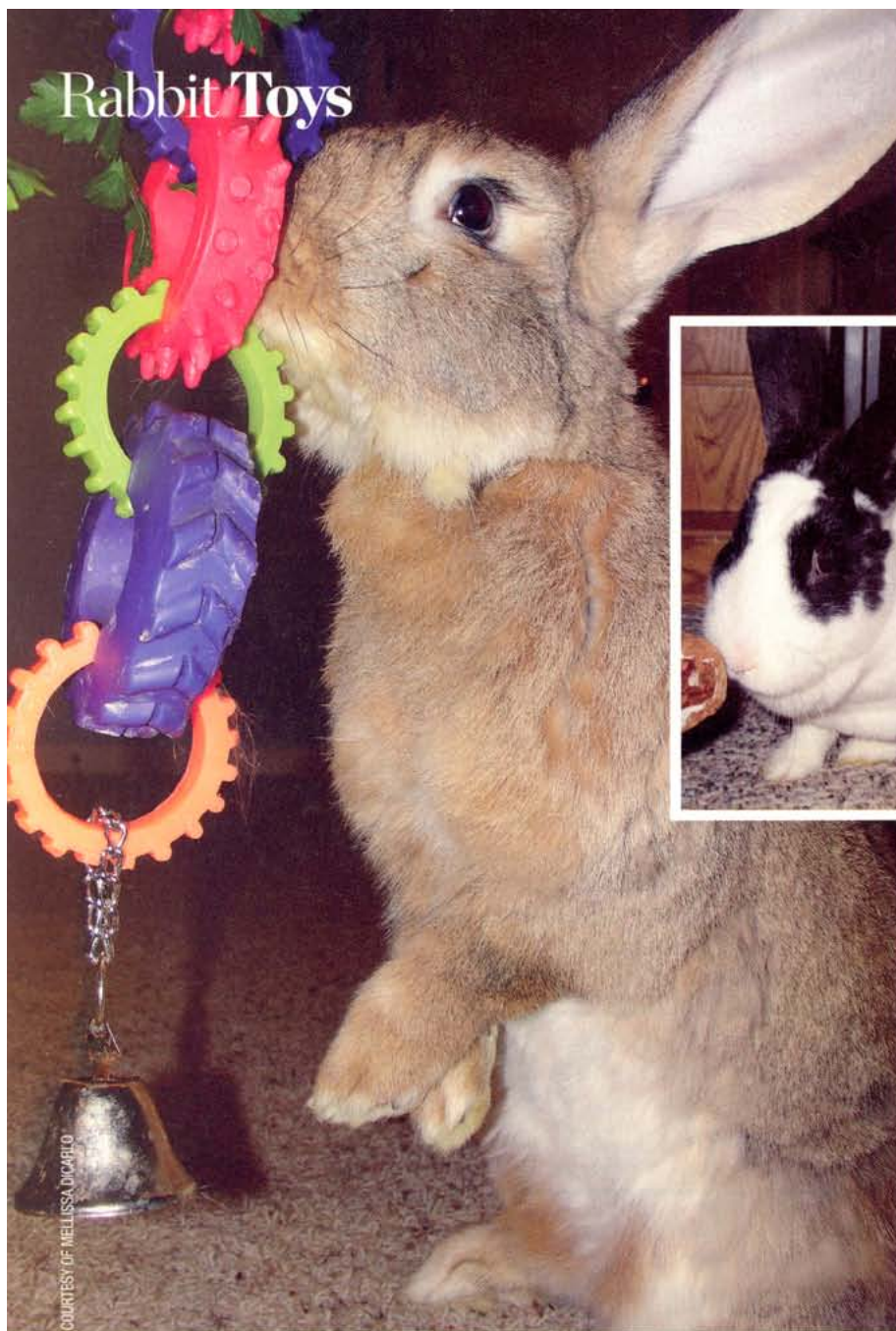
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Melissa DiCarlo said hanging toys are a hit with many of her adopted rabbits, including Roo, shown here.



Isabella is also owned by Melissa DiCarlo.

Claire Scudder also of Michigan, has a Flemish Giant named Quinn that enjoys a toy ball. "He enjoys batting and chasing it around," Scudder noted.

Treat toys and puzzles: A rabbit treat toy is similar to a dog's treat-dispensing toy — holes are built into the toy and you fill it with treats.

When your rabbit plays with the toy, the treats fall out. The Ringoots described a treat toy enjoyed by their first rabbit, Rosie, who was obviously very smart. "She would only play with it when there were treats in it."

Rabbit toy puzzles are also treat-related; however, the toy is stationary and can have holes for hiding treats. The holes are then covered up, and the rabbit must move pieces of the toy to reveal a treat, similar to opening containers. Doreen Reynolds-Consolati of Massachusetts has a 5-year-old Mini Lop, Mickey, that plays with a rabbit puzzle. "[It's] a wooden toy where he has to pick up the lids to find the treat hidden in the recesses, and he will regularly lift the lids to

see if there's a treat inside."

Chew toys and other edible items: Many toys for rabbits are edible (for obvious reasons). Toys just for chewing are a tried-and-true favorite and are likely familiar to most rabbit owners. It's difficult to go down an aisle at the pet store and not notice the adorable chew toys shaped like carrots and other veggies, keyrings and sticks, many of these being made of safe, wooden materials.

Another material popular for rabbit chews is willow. Luther said that all of his rabbits enjoy chewing on willow rings. Any chew toy is a valuable gnawing outlet and, as mentioned, can help keep rabbit teeth worn down. Chew toys are also popular with bunnies that enjoy tossing toys around. In addition, the tunnels, balls and other items made of edible materials offer a double-dose of fun: A tunnel is not just for

three rabbits and one of them, Smokey, claims her tunnel as her favorite toy. "She loves to chew on it, lay and relax in it, and sometimes she even pushes it around," they said.

And their rabbits aren't the only tunnel enthusiasts. "Our rabbits enjoy running through tunnels — of which we have three," Luther said. He also mentions a variation on the tunnel theme: a maze. "Pip, a male Netherland dwarf, will spring around the room, hitting every tunnel and racing through the maze." That bunny sounds like he knows how to have fun!

Toy balls: Toy balls can be made of various materials, from plastic to willow to grass. At first, it may seem odd to picture a bunny playing with a ball, but rabbits often push them around. Melissa DiCarlo of Michigan has various toys for her adopted rabbits, including balls. "They nudge balls with their noses and chase after them," she said.

TOYS FOR SPECIAL-NEEDS RABBITS

Some rabbits may require a bit more care when it comes to their toy selection. Rabbits with special needs enjoy toys, too, they just need a conscientious caretaker who considers their needs. Here are just a few examples of some special needs a rabbit may have and how their owners provided appropriate toys.

► **Missing front teeth:** "I have several bunnies who don't have their front teeth, so the toys designed to chew or toss ... aren't much use to them. But I have found toys they enjoy. They can still push around plastic balls with bells in them and climb in and on the boxes or [a rabbit cottage]."

— Alison Giese of California

► **Vertigo:** "Our Dutch rabbit, Zoey, has chronic vertigo due to a bout of vestibular disease. We make sure that she has ample toys and activities on the ground to prevent her penchant for climbing onto things. Because she has the tendency to tumble now, we no longer allow her to climb."

— David Luther of Michigan

Whether a rabbit is healthy or has some special needs due to a medical issue, he will appreciate having toys and playtime.



COURTESY OF DAVID LUTHER

► **Blindness:** "I have one blind rabbit, Henry. He prefers toys that make noise. He likes the ones that contain bells. He can follow the sound of them."

— Gretta Parker of West Virginia

► **Other eye problems:** "My foster bunny, Bunbun, has a permanent eye-draining issue. I need to keep any toy that may have small particles away in order to keep his eye clean, such as a hay or rope toy."

— Claire Scudder of Michigan

burrowing, but it can also be for chewing.

Hanging toys: Hanging toys could be loosely compared to a mobile. Instead of being held aloft where the rabbit cannot get to it, however, hanging toys are right where your rabbit can bat at and chew on them. Various hanging toys are available, and many have wooden chew toys dangling on them. Just like a ball, a hanging toy does not immediately strike a person as a typical rabbit toy — however, some rabbits really get a kick out of them.

DiCarlo's adopted rabbits will bang their hanging toys around and have fun biting on the edges. Scudder, who keeps foster bunnies, said that hanging toys are a hit with all of her rabbits.

Like any intelligent animal, rabbits tend to be creative with their playthings. Meredith Miller of Georgia has four rabbits that multitask with their hanging toys. "Hanging toys are ripped down by them so that they can all push them around or toss them up in the air," she said of her rabbits Twilight, Thump, Dobby and Winky.

Choosing Toys & Switching Them Up

With all of these choices, what toy should you start with for your rabbit? There is no one-size-fits-all toy that all bunnies will use and enjoy. For this reason, toy manufacturers work to address bunny likes and dislikes. "We try to make toys appealing to rabbits," Cappel said. "Unique colors or textures, as well as sounds, are some features to look for to engage rabbit senses." She and other rabbit experts suggest



Hanging toys and balls are some of the toys enjoyed by the rabbits fostered or owned by Claire Scudder. This is Zorro.

COURTESY OF CLAIRE SCUDDER

Rabbit Toys

Toys helped Stanley, owned by Gretta Parker of West Virginia, overcome his initial aggression when he joined her family.



COURTESY OF GRETTA PARKER

watching your rabbit and choosing a toy that engages your pet. Choosing toys for your rabbit is easy — just pay attention to your rabbit and see what he or she enjoys doing.

And although your rabbit may have a favorite toy, variety is one of the keys to avoiding bunny boredom. Rabbit owners report good results when they switch at

least some toys out now and then. Brian Kindl, vice president of key accounts at Ware Manufacturing Inc., said that rabbits are “always interested in something new.” And you don’t have to break the bank continually purchasing new toys. “You can ... reintroduce an older toy at a later time, and it can be viewed as new,” he said.

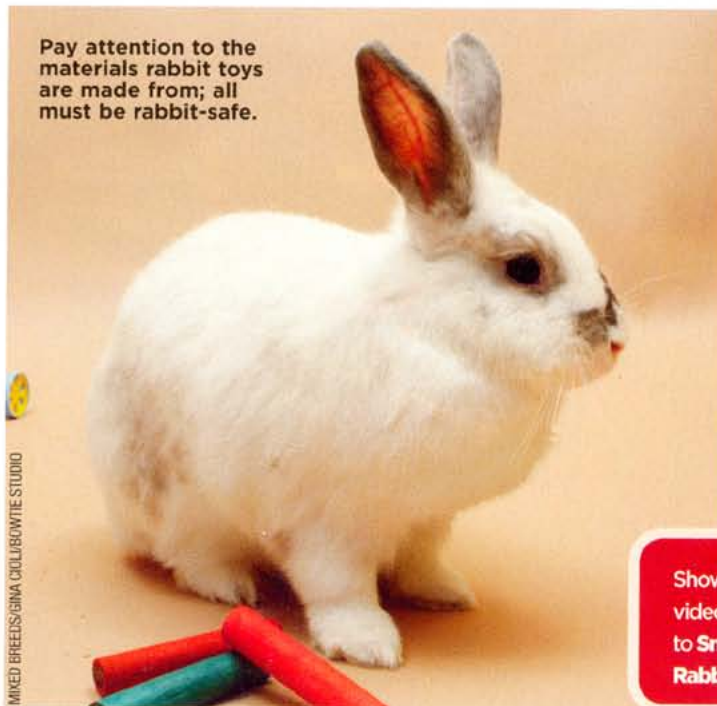
The bunnies in Scudder’s household prove that rabbits do play favorites and enjoy variety at the same time. “All of my bunnies enjoy new ... but a few are attached to that one toy that they don’t ever want taken out.”

At the same time, switching toys often may not work for your bunnies; it all depends on their personalities. Rabbits that tend to play rough, in terms of chewing, simply need new chewables. “I have tried to rotate toys, but they get destroyed or chewed into pieces if they have had them for more than a few hours,” Miller said. Of course, it is imperative that worn-out toys be replaced for safety reasons.

Rabbit Fun Time!

While it’s not difficult to pick the right toy for your rabbit, it may take just a little experimentation. Finding toys that your bunny enjoys leads to better mental health and better behavior for your pet, as well as helping avoid teeth problems. Most likely, you will be just as

Pay attention to the materials rabbit toys are made from; all must be rabbit-safe.



MIKED BREEDS/GINA CHOLUBOWITZ STUDIO

Show off your rabbit! Upload a video of your rabbit at play. Go to SmallAnimalChannel.com/RabbitAtPlay

Some rabbits enjoy playing with tunnels, and if the tunnel is edible, that makes it twice as fun.

MIXED BREED/GINA COLUBROWITE STUDIO



RABBITS AT PLAY

Want to see some of the rabbits from this article in action? Check out:

► SmallAnimalChannel.com/NewRabbitToy

► SmallAnimalChannel.com/RabbitRattleToy

amused by the toys as your rabbit is, as watching bunnies play can show how smart rabbits really are. So go find your bunnies some toys — they will have a ton of fun playing, and watching them may provide endless entertainment for you, too! 🐰

Patricia Knight has kept several types of small animal pets, including various rabbits, birds and fish. She is a former editor at BowTie Inc. and is currently a freelance writer specializing in pet topics. Some of her other articles have appeared in Marine Fish & Reef USA, Aquarium Fish International and Pet Product News International magazines.



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