

Helpful Hints

By Tonna Thomas

If you have raised rabbits for any length of time, you know some of the “tricks of the trade”. Let us share some of those “tricks” with others in this article.

Everyone has had those rabbits that just do not want to eat, thus they say I am going to die, you cannot make me live, leave me alone. Well, this ole softie just does not give in to easily. I have often thought to myself, it looks like a 7 course meal in their cage.

Offer various items to tempt them. I start out with straw. Simple but a rabbit can sustain themselves on it for a while. I once saw a rabbit that ate only a pittance of pellets but would eat straw. After a couple of months of this, you would have thought she would have been under nourished. Wrong! Her condition and fur was great. I tend to give fescue hay and straw only because straw to me is not appealing. However, I do not eat it! Any grass hay is fine but do not give alfalfa, it is too high in protein and will tend to scour a rabbit.

If they do not eat anything for 2 days, I start them on Nutri-Cal. It can be purchased at any feed store in the dog/cat aisle. It is a high caloric paste that is given orally. I give them as much as I can squeeze into their mouth twice a day. I have saved many rabbits with this alone. Old fashion oatmeal is another temptation you can try.

Here in the Midwest we have what is called chard. It is a broad waxy leafy weed. Sometimes rabbits will eat that over anything else. Comfrey is also green herb that rabbits will eat.

Other temptations you can try are blackberry or rose leaves. Dandelions, mustard weeds and dried oak leaves are also lures to getting rabbits to eat.

Some rabbits will also lick up yogurt. This also gets their digestive tract back in order and keeps them hydrated. If they do not eat it on their own, give it to them through a syringe.

Ok, let’s go on to fur. Did you know the best way to groom your rabbit is a little water on your hands and rub back and forth removing the loose hair. There are conditioners out there, but water is one of the best items.

Having three breeds of white rabbits is sometimes challenging keeping them white. I have tried lining them up buck/doe/buck/doe and buck, buck, buck, solid dividers and no dividers. It does not matter, if they are sprayers, you will have urine stained coats. Try using a mixture of 50% water and white vinegar in a spray bottle. Spray it on, use washcloth type towel and work it in with your thumb and index finger. Then take a pinch of cornstarch and work that in. Make sure you brush out the extra when dried. It will surprise you how much you will remove. Of course, if it has been there for a while, you may have to wait until the rabbit molts to loose the stain.

Keeping the rabbit cool is another topic. If you have just a few rabbits, frozen 2-liter soda bottles can be placed in their cage. If you use crocks, the rabbits will lay up against them to keep cool. Bricks and/or small carpet pieces (with lots of nap) can be soaked in cold water then placed in the cage. Watch the rug pieces as they may tend to be soiled on.

If you use outside hutches, try hanging burlap bags on the front of the cage and place a soaker hose on top. The water drips on the bags thus you have an evaporative cooling system. This works where humidity is low.

More helpful hints:

*Vinegar in the water helps with urine odor while traveling. Some also say it helps the does conceive.

*Zaps It sprayed on the shavings controls odors while traveling.

*When a doe pulls too much fur in the summer, remove the excess and save it in a paper bag. Add it the nest that does not have quite enough in the winter. By then the smell is gone and the does will not mind the help.

*Ear mite – Ivomec works well. Since I am not a veterinarian, I cannot give amounts. If asked I will tell you what I give.

*Diarrhea – I use Neomycin Oral Solution. Again, I cannot give the amounts but would tell you what I do if asked. You can also try Kaopectate.

*Hairballs – Petromalt Hairball Remedy for cat fur balls works. Some breeders will give them pineapple juice.

*Nest box eye – open the eye with a moistened cotton ball. Terramycin ophthalmic ointment helps. However, most times, you will have a small spot let over if not caught early enough.

*Does won't breed – Take them to a show or load them in your car and take them shopping/work with you if weather permits. Just the motion of moving and the warm car will usually bring them into cycle and they will be willing to breed the following day. Beside, they like window-shopping!

*Sprinkle lime under the cages or on trays to control flies.

I know there are a lot of other “home remedies” out there. If you know of something, share it with others. I hope there is something here that helps you in the future.