



Potter League  
*Enriching Lives*

## INTRODUCING HOUSE RABBITS

Before attempting an introduction, the rabbits must be spayed and neutered and you should wait for a full two weeks after the surgery before proceeding with the introduction. This delay both ensures proper healing and gives the hormones a chance to dissipate. This delay is especially important with a newly neutered male, as a male bunny can still be fertile for two weeks after surgery.

It's important to know that hasty introductions often result in serious harm or injury from biting, chasing or other forms of attack. Rabbits are very territorial and are not quick to forget, so a bad fight could hinder future bonding success. Taking the time, reading up and waiting for two spayed or neutered rabbits to be introduced will ensure you the best possible chance at a loving, bonded relationship.

### Possible Types of Introductions:

**Boy and girl:** One of the easiest, often fall in love at first sight, but not always.

**Girl and girl:** Sometimes easy, often fighting.

**Boy and boy:** Sometimes easy, sometimes difficult, usually fighting at first, but not at all impossible.

**Two babies:** Extremely easy.

**Three or more rabbits:** Difficulty varies, depending on sexes, personalities and whether or not two of the rabbits are already bonded.

**Baby and adult:** Sometimes difficult, but goes well if adult is very tolerant.

Bringing home a rabbit to an existing, resident rabbit: Much easier if you bring a girl home to a boy than if you bring a boy rabbit home to a girl.

Bringing two rabbits home at the same time: Quite easy, even if they're same sex. Usually the new space is enough to make them become friends on their own, plus neither bunny has established that this is his or her territory.

### Possible Scenarios After First Introduction:

**Love at first sight:** If this occurs, you can try them in the space they're going to live in. If it's still good, then they're fine; you have nothing else to do.

**Tentative friendship:** If this occurs, just watch them when they're together, keep them separate when you're not around and if no fighting occurs, they'll eventually become friends.

**Amorous behavior:** If the neutered male mounts the spayed female, and the female does not mind, then this is usually a sign that the relationship will go well. If she does mind, and runs, it is still not usually a problem. If she minds and becomes aggressive toward him, then you must prepare for a lengthier introduction period and take it slow.

**One chasing, one running:** If this occurs, just make sure the one running doesn't fight back and doesn't get hurt. If neither of these things occurs, then just watch and wait. If



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one gets hurt, then separate them and go slower and if one fights back, then you must prepare for a full introduction period. Go very slow.

**Fighting:** When two new rabbits (or, for that matter, two existing rabbits) fight, then you must prepare for a full introduction period. Go very slow.

### **How To Work with Space**

Rabbits are extremely territorial. In wild rabbits, territorial behavior includes depositing marking pellets at the boundaries of the territory, chinning, urinating and aggressive behavior, such as digging, circling and fighting. Wild males tend to defend larger territories while females concentrate on their nests. In our neutered domestic companions, hormonal causes may be absent, but territorial behavior still exists. Thus, when introducing new rabbits, territory must be considered and used to your advantage.

What you're trying to do is eliminate the possibility for there to develop any territorial behavior in the rabbits. So, choose introductory spaces that are as different from your bunny's territory as possible. You're also trying to mimic positive feelings in your rabbits. By creating artificial situations where your bunnies are snuggling, rubbing noses, smelling each other's fur, etc., you are creating positive memories even if they are also stressful. This is called "coerced closeness." They are positive in the sense that they don't associate the other bun with the stress (of the car ride, for example), instead they associate the other rabbit with the feelings of security that they receive. If they fight, then they will carry those bad memories around with them, and will remember that they fought together.

Always introduce rabbits, regardless of sex or age, in neutral space first. Obviously, if you're bringing home two bunnies for the first time, any space in your home is neutral. Possible neutral spaces might be a room your rabbit has never been in, a friend's home or apartment, the seat of a car, on top of the kitchen table, in the garage, bathtub, backyard, etc.

Try to bring your current rabbit with you to pick up your new rabbit. This allows the two to share that first car ride together. Work with the rabbits for at least 20 minutes per day. Make sure to spend some time with the rabbits in one or more neutral space every day. When you're not actively working with them, they should be apart if they fight when together. If they don't fight, then they can be left alone while you're not working with them, but not when you're not home at all.

Every day, try using two different situations: one relatively stressful like a car ride, followed by one relatively normal like the floor of a new room or the top of the bed. That way, you can try to gradually transition them from strange to normal situations, without them fighting. If you immediately attempt to let them run around on the floor together, without first having taken them for a car ride, they may forget that the space is neutral and fight anyway.

Use a water bottle with the nozzle set on "stream" to break up any fights that occur. It's best to spray the instigator before a fight actually occurs by watching for aggressive body language, rather than work on breaking up an existing fight.



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None of these suggestions will work by themselves and none will work immediately, usually. Work with your rabbits every day for at least twenty minutes or so a day, and when you're not working with them, keep them in eye contact of each other. Start with extreme scenarios and gradually move to less extreme. Do one extreme and one less extreme every day. The more often you work with them, the quicker the progress. If you want to move at a quicker pace, then you need to arrange a large block of time, like a week's vacation, in an extremely neutral space, like a friend or relative's house. If one rabbit is elderly or otherwise compromised, then go very slowly to minimize stress.