

Housing and Management Practices for Rabbits

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Introduction

Rabbit farming has been practiced for centuries, initially as a means of hunting and later for the production of meat and fur. Today, rabbits are increasingly recognized as an important livestock species because of their high reproductive capacity, short generation interval and rapid growth rate. These characteristics make rabbit farming particularly suitable for meat production. In many developing countries, rabbits are being promoted as an alternative source of high-quality animal protein. Since rabbits are small animals, they require considerably less space than larger livestock such as goats and sheep. They can also be maintained on locally available feed resources such as green leaves, vegetables and hay. Under intensive production systems, rabbits are generally provided with concentrate feed along with green fodder. Rabbit meat is considered a nutritious source of animal protein. It is characterized by high-quality protein and relatively low levels of fat, cholesterol and sodium, along with a favourable proportion of unsaturated fatty acids. However, good production depends not only on breed and feeding but also on providing suitable housing and proper day-to-day management.

Building the Right Rabbit House: Proper housing is one of the most important aspects of successful rabbit farming. A well-designed rabbit house, or **rabbitry**, provides a healthy environment that supports growth, reproduction and overall productivity. Poor housing can increase disease problems, reduce growth and adversely affect reproductive performance.

Important factors to be considered before constructing a rabbitry.

Location: The first step is to select a suitable site. A rabbitry should preferably be located close to sources of clean water, feed, green fodder and electricity, while also having convenient access to roads and markets. Good accessibility makes routine management easier and reduces difficulties in transporting animals, feed and farm produce. The rabbitry should be constructed on a raised, dry and well-drained

site. Low-lying areas where rainwater accumulates should be avoided. Excess moisture can increase humidity inside the shed and create favourable conditions for the spread of diseases. Proper drainage around the rabbitry is therefore essential.

Ventilation: Good ventilation is critical for maintaining a healthy rabbit house. Inadequate air movement can result in the accumulation of moisture and ammonia, particularly when urine and manure are not removed efficiently. High ammonia levels can irritate the respiratory tract and predispose rabbits to respiratory problems. A well-designed shed should therefore allow adequate fresh air to enter and stale air to escape. Proper ventilation helps remove excess moisture and ammonia, reduces heat stress during summer and improves the overall air quality inside the rabbitry.



Cage System: Commercial rabbit farms commonly use a cage system. Cages may be arranged as single-tier or two-tier systems, depending on the size and design of the rabbitry. They may be supported using hanging systems or arranged in stepwise rack systems. Cages should be elevated above the floor rather than placed directly on the ground. This arrangement allows faeces and urine to fall below the cages and makes cleaning and waste management considerably easier. Metal wire mesh is commonly used for cage construction because it is durable, easy to clean and allows good ventilation. Cage dimensions should be appropriate for the age, size and production purpose of the rabbits, allowing sufficient space for normal movement, feeding and resting.

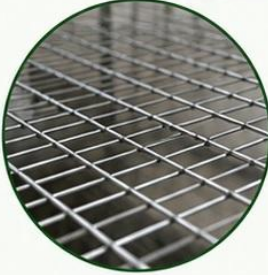
rain. Roofing materials should be selected and designed to minimize heat transfer into the shed. In hot regions, additional cooling measures may be required. Where appropriate, sprinkler or evaporative cooling systems can be used during periods of extreme summer heat. However, excessive wetting of the shed should be avoided because increased humidity can create additional health problems. The rabbitry should also be designed to protect animals from predators, birds and other harmful animals. Proper fencing, secure doors and protective mesh are important, particularly in areas where dogs, cats, rodents or wild predators are present. Rabbits are naturally timid animals and can be easily frightened. Therefore, the rabbitry should preferably be located in a quiet and peaceful

ELEVATED CAGES – BETTER FOR RABBITS



- ✓ Cages should be elevated above the floor, not placed directly on the ground.
- ✓ Faeces and urine fall below the cages.
- ✓ Keeps rabbits clean and the environment hygienic.
- ✓ Makes cleaning and waste management much easier.

CAGE CONSTRUCTION



- Metal wire mesh is commonly used for cage construction.
- It is durable, strong and long-lasting.
- Easy to clean and disinfect.
- Allows good air circulation and light penetration.



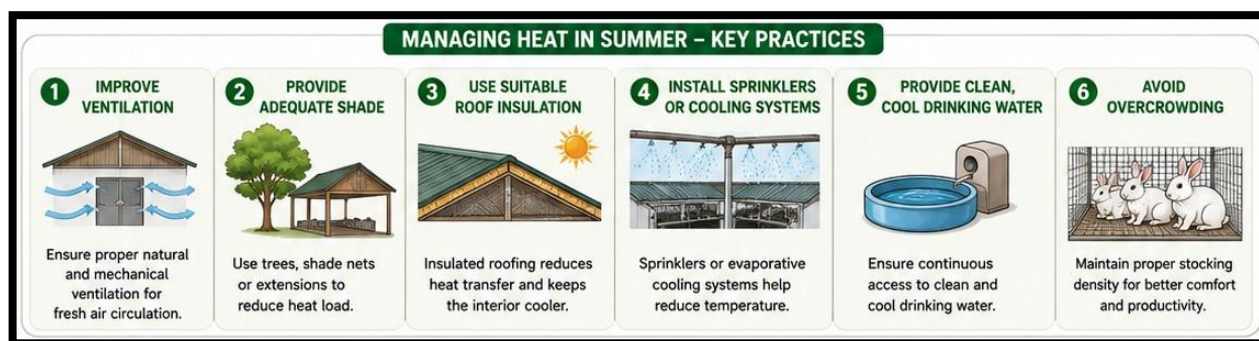
Category of Rabbit	Approx. Body Weight	Cage Size (L x W x H)	Floor Space
 Weaners (4–8 weeks)	0.5 – 1.0 kg	60 x 45 x 35 cm	0.27 m ²
 Growers (8–12 weeks)	1.0 – 2.0 kg	70 x 50 x 40 cm	0.35 m ²
 Adults (Breeding)	> 2.0 kg	75 x 50 x 40–45 cm	0.375 m ²

Cage dimension for different age groups

Protecting Rabbits from Heat and Predators: The roof of the rabbit house should provide effective protection from direct sunlight and

environment, away from unnecessary disturbance.

Shed Orientation: The orientation of the rabbit house can influence the internal temperature and comfort of the animals. In warm tropical



conditions, the long axis of the shed is commonly oriented in an east–west direction to minimize direct exposure of the longer sides to intense solar radiation. Proper orientation, combined with adequate ventilation, suitable roofing and shading, can help maintain a more comfortable environment inside the rabbitry. Three environmental factors—light, temperature and humidity—are particularly important in rabbit production. Maintaining these factors within suitable limits helps support animal health, growth and reproductive performance. Light plays an important role in reproductive activity in rabbits. Both natural and artificial lighting can be used to maintain an appropriate photoperiod, particularly in intensive production systems. Adequate lighting is important for maintaining normal reproductive activity. In some management systems, approximately 8–12 hours of light per day may be provided for bucks, while breeding does may be exposed to longer photoperiods, sometimes around 16 hours of light per day, depending on the production system. If natural daylight is insufficient, artificial lighting can be used to provide a consistent photoperiod. Lighting programmes, however, should be adapted to the production system and should avoid unnecessary disturbance to the animals.

Temperature: Rabbits are sensitive to environmental temperature, particularly to heat stress. A temperature range of approximately 10°C to 26°C is generally considered comfortable for rabbits, although the optimum range can vary with age, breed, physiological

status and environmental conditions. When temperatures rise excessively, rabbits may reduce their feed intake and growth rate. Prolonged heat stress can also negatively affect reproductive performance.

Controlling Humidity: Maintaining appropriate relative humidity is also important. A relative humidity of around 50% is generally desirable for a comfortable rabbit-house environment. Excessive humidity can contribute to poor air quality and increase ammonia accumulation, especially when ventilation is inadequate. Persistent dampness can also favour the development and spread of infectious organisms. To control humidity, the rabbitry should have good ventilation, efficient drainage and effective manure and urine management. Water leakage and unnecessary wetting of floors or cages should also be avoided. Rabbits are sensitive animals and can react strongly to sudden or continuous noise. Excessive noise and frequent disturbance may cause fear and stress, which can negatively influence animal behaviour, health and reproductive performance. A rabbitry should therefore be located away from sources of excessive noise, heavy traffic and unnecessary human disturbance. Workers should handle rabbits calmly and gently, particularly during breeding, pregnancy, kindling and nursing.

Housing for Better Production: Successful rabbit farming begins with providing the right environment. A rabbit house should be dry, well ventilated, adequately illuminated, protected



from extreme temperatures and secure from predators. Proper cage design, waste disposal, temperature and humidity management, and reduction of unnecessary noise are equally important. For farmers, housing is not simply an investment in infrastructure—it is an investment in animal health, welfare and productivity. When rabbits are provided with a comfortable and hygienic environment, combined with proper feeding, breeding and health care, they can become an efficient and profitable source of high-quality meat, particularly for small and medium-scale farmers.