



# Finding your rabbit a friend

Rabbits are hugely social animals and have evolved to physically and mentally benefit from having the company of their own species. No matter how much attention an adopter can offer a rabbit, it will never match having a bonded partner. Getting a friend for your rabbit means they won't be lonely, are less likely to become bored, are usually less stressed and benefit from extra warmth and grooming from their friend.

## Are rabbits happier in pairs/groups?

Yes! Rabbits in the wild live in complex social systems and rarely chose to live alone. As prey animals, they feel safer around their own kind and rely on having another that understands their communication.



## Age: is my rabbit too old to find a friend?

No! No matter what age, rabbits benefit from being around others. A solitary life when older, especially if dealing with health issues, is scary. If your rabbit has had partners previously and is then left alone it can be very stressful for them. We are happy to pair up and bond no matter how old - it is often advised to get a similarly aged friend if looking to not start a cycle of getting new buns as the older ones pass.

## Can a guinea pig be a friend?

Unfortunately not! While they are somewhat similar, rabbits and guinea pigs should not live in the same airspace. They communicate in very different ways, need different nutrients from food and the size difference can lead to injuries if arguments occur. There are also illnesses that can pass between the species, eg Bordetella which is not problematic for rabbits but can be fatal to guinea pigs.

**For more information please see [www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk) for up to date rabbit welfare, care and health information.**

## Does my rabbit need to be neutered to find a friend?

Ideally yes! Male rabbits absolutely need to be neutered to bond as they can be quite aggressive when not. After neuter, you need to wait 6-8 weeks until trying to bond to let their hormones settle down. Female rabbits can technically be bonded when not neutered but the process is usually a lot smoother if they are as again they can be more aggressive. **It is recommended that all female rabbits are neutered regardless of living situation**, as up to 80% of intact female rabbits will develop uterine cancer by the time that they are 5 years old. If your rabbit is not neutered, have a look for a rabbit savvy vet (the RWAf can provide options) who can advise. If a rabbit cannot be neutered due to health problems there are still potential options to help them find a friend so please get in touch.

## Does my rabbit need to be vaccinated to find a friend?

Yes! Unfortunately Myxomatosis, RVHD1 and RVHD2 are extremely prevalent in the UK so rabbits need vaccinations to protect them.

Even house rabbits can be affected so need to be done yearly. There is a combination vaccine that covers all 3 diseases. Rabbits have extremely fast metabolisms so they



need to be jabbed every year to make sure they are completely covered. Before we adopt out friends, we would need to see proof of vaccination (eg vacc card or vet record) within the last 12 months. Have a chat with your vet for more info.

## Pairs, trios or groups?

Pairs tend to be the most common grouping. Mixed sexed pairs are generally a good match, but if all involved are neutered then same sex pairs are absolutely possible. If you already have a happy and stable bonded pair it is often better to leave them be rather than try to bond with additional rabbits, as the process can damage the bond between the original pair. Trios can work very well but are often more temperamental. They tend to work best when 3 individuals meet rather than a solo joining a pair, as that can end up with a third wheel situation. The politics of groupings get more complicated as you get more but any sized grouping can in theory work if the personalities mesh well. You would need to consider the space needs and financial implications of having more rabbits.

## Will I get my first choice friend?

Ideally but this can't be guaranteed. We would never force rabbits that don't get on to live together and want to make the overall process as smooth as possible for everyone involved. We can advise who might be the best fit to start with and if this doesn't work we will get in touch to discuss other options. Sometimes a little bit of speed dating is needed!

## Choosing a friend for your rabbit:

- 1.) **Sex** - neutered mixed sex pairings are generally the most common and have a good success rate. In general personality is the most important factor so if a good match then sex is not overly important. It is not recommended to have trios or larger groups of all one sex as they balance better with a mix.
- 2.) **Age** - while in principle age doesn't hugely matter when finding a friend, it is generally advised to go for a rabbit that is a similar age to your own. It is not advised to put baby rabbits with much older ones as this can lead to bullying and the dynamics will change as the youngster reaches maturity which could cause problems. Rabbits can live 10-12 years so if pairing up a younger rabbit with an older one then you need to be prepared for when the younger one is left alone, which can lead to a cycle of getting new rabbits to pair with the leftover one.
- 3.) **Size** - rabbits don't care about size! You can bond rabbits of any size together, often the smaller ones will end up being the bossy ones. If bonding rabbits with a large size difference then more care does need to be taken when bonding as if a fight occurs then there is a greater potential for injury. Space available is a factor when deciding what size rabbits to have.
- 4.) **Breed/Colour** - rabbits do not care about looks at all! They use smell and personality to make their judgements on potential friends and do not care about shape, colour, ears, fur type etc. While we understand that adopters have preferences and are happy to work with them, the most important thing is that the rabbits have a good personality match so we would not force it just because the friend had the right look. We recommend that adopters come in with an open mind and be open to meeting a few rabbits to act as potential matches and then letting their rabbit make their own decision during bonding.

## Bonding

After you have been approved to adopt and reserved a rabbit, we can book in a bonding date. This will entail your rabbit coming to stay at the rescue for a few days while we introduce them to possible matches and start the bonding process off. Once we are happy that they are a good match they can go home to continue bonding (with plenty of help and advice on how to do this!). There will be potential to keep the rabbits here longer using our boarding pens if adopters wanted extra bonding help, however this will be at an additional cost. Unfortunately we can't allow rabbits to be bonded at home by adopters as it can be a difficult process and we don't

want to put that risk on the adopters or rabbits. Doing bonding in the rescue is the least stress option for all involved. You will be able to get updates on how things are going throughout the bonding stay.

