



Showing Market Rabbits Starter Guide.



Overview:

Preparing for and showing livestock can be an extremely rewarding and educational experience for youth. The lessons learned in showing and raising livestock are invaluable. However, it can feel very intimidating to begin. This guide is a broad overview at how to prepare for showing market rabbits. All exhibitors are encouraged to ask questions as they grow through the program.



How to prepare for purchasing your animal:

Proper housing and good equipment are vital in having a successful rabbit project. When looking at setting up the space in which your rabbits will be housed, it important to make sure the animals are comfortable and that you will be able to easily handle them. The first thing to consider is the hutch or cage. You want one that allows for the rabbits to receive fresh air and sunlight. It should protect your rabbits from bad weather, other animals, and provide enough space for growth and exercise. You also can purchase a cage if you are keeping your rabbit indoors. Each individual rabbit should have a space at least 36" wide x 30" deep x 18" high. Hutches and cages should remain clean for the rabbits. Secondly, you want to think about the feeders you want to use in your hutches. You can use a feed crock, trough, hopper or an outside mounted self-feeder. Make sure whatever feeder you chose will minimize waste of food and contamination from soil and manure. For watering, you can use a water bottle or an automatic waterer. Crock waterers or bowls pose a risk of easily being spilled and leaving your rabbit thirsty. Water should be clean daily.



Purchasing your animal:

The majority of market rabbits are purchased between May and June for July Shows. Rabbits will be born depending on what you decide to show.

For Market Classes, Roaster Rabbits must be born and purchased between February 1 and June 1 to be under 6 months of age by fair. Fryers must be born (kindled by the exhibitor) between May 13 and June 10 to be 6-10 weeks old by fair.

For Breeding Classes, Junior Rabbits will be born between March and April. Intermediate Rabbits are born in December and January. Senior Rabbits are born before December. The ownership deadline for breeding animals is May 1. Rabbits have what is called a "Standard of Excellence" for each breed. Please refer to the Standard of Excellence for your breed(s).



Feeding your animal:

There are many feeds available for your market rabbits. Many commercially available feeds are considered complete feeds and have a lot of the nutrients rabbits need. It is recommended that commercial rabbit feeds contain a 16 to 18 percent protein. You should feed pelleted feed at 1/2 cup in the morning and 1/2 cup at night

Your rabbit should never run out of food. You should have a little left over each day but not a lot as the pellets can draw moisture. You can adjust how much feed you are giving based on how much is left over. Ask your breeder that you buy your rabbit from what they recommend. Check the label and make sure the first ingredient is either Forage Products or a type of hay. Avoid giving any fruits, vegetables, or leafy greens. They can cause diarrhea. You can feed hay by the handful to provide fiber to the diet.

Water is also extremely important and is directly related to feed intake. The water source needs to be clean, fresh, and abundant.



Handling Your Rabbits

Proper handling is important for both the safety of you and your rabbits. Before handling, it is important to spend time with them and build their trust. Regular interactions are important to show the animal that you are good and deserving of their trust. You can sit by their hutch or cage and pet them. Allow them to get used to your smell and voice before handling them. When you have spent a good amount of time with them, you can start to handle them. Lift the rabbit up from underneath, supporting the chest with one hand and the rear with the other hand. The back feet should be flat in the palm of your hand or held between your fingers. The rabbit's head should be tucked into the crook of your elbow or armpit area. Rabbits may wiggle a lot at first. You can start by holding them while sitting if you are nervous about dropping them. They may kick, scratch or bite at first. If they do, you may want to spend more time with them getting used to you. Do not take your frustrations out on your animal. Trust can be difficult or impossible to get back if you break it by hitting or yelling at your animal.



Preparing for a Show

It is important to read the rules of any show before going. The rules for your County Fair are in the Fair Rule Book. You also will need to practice getting your rabbit ready for inspection during shows. At least 6 weeks prior to your show, begin working with your rabbits regularly. This includes brushing your rabbits, rubbing their hair coat to remove excess fur and training the rabbit to sit still on the show table. To get ready for the table, set a towel down on a table and practice setting them down. Gently keep your hands on them until they are used to it. You will need to practice putting the rabbit in various positions for the show. It is recommended that you attend an in person practice or watch tutorials online to be prepared.



Preparing for Showmanship

Before showmanship, you will want to be knowledgeable about basic rabbit anatomy, common health concerns, and the breed of your rabbit. You are more so showing off your gain in knowledge and your comfort with your rabbits! This is why it is important to build trust with your animals for weeks beforehand.

Materials for Show Preparation

- Table
- Towel or carpet square
- Dish Towel or rag
- Paper towels
- Nail Trimmers

Preparing your rabbit's coat for the show should start about a month or more before the show. You will want to get the rabbit damp by using your hands and a cup or bowl of water. Then stroke them to get dead hair off of them. Always brush from head to tail. Before the show, it is important to have your rabbits clean and presentable. However, it is dangerous to give them baths or to wash them under a hose or hydrant because they can go into shock easily. Take a bucket with soapy water and a rag to clean spots of dirt or manure off them. Also wipe down ears with a paper towel but make sure that you do not go too deep in the ear or allow water to drip into the ear. You also will want to make sure the nails of the rabbit are not exceptionally long. Trim long nails with canine trimmers but be careful to avoid the quick (the pink part of the nail supplying blood).



Common Health Concerns

- **Lice and mites:** In most cases, treatment is simple, but left untreated, a parasite infestation can lead to serious skin problems. The first symptoms of a parasite problem tend to include itchy skin, dandruff and hair loss. Treat with topical medication. Follow directions and observe.
- **Enteritis:** Is a digestive tract disease that presents with diarrhea and weight loss. It is caused by a bacteria in the digestive tract that flourishes when the rabbit is stressed. Stress can be caused by outside animals or noises or switching feed abruptly. Young rabbits are the most at risk. Limit stress and watch stool after a stress event (can take a week to show symptoms).
- **Upper Respiratory Disease:** Often caused by pasteurellosis, it causes sneezing, snotty eyes/nose, fast breathing, a reduced appetite and weight loss. Fluoroquinolone antibiotics are generally effective but must be prescribed by a vet.
- **Wry Neck:** Wry neck makes a rabbit's neck twist, causing the head to tilt sideways and will cause involuntary movement of the eyes. It is not usually survivable. It is usually caused by middle ear infections which can be treated with antibiotics if caught before wry neck sets in.
- **Intestinal Worms:** Intestinal worms can cause loss of appetite, lower weight gain, skin irritations and more. You can prevent worms by keeping cages clean. If you suspect worms you can use a dewormer to get rid of them.



What will my Project Cost?

Livestock projects can really add up in cost. It is important to ensure that you can afford your project before buying animals. It also is important to consider what you are likely to make from your project to offset the cost. Below is a breakdown:

Cost of purchasing your animal: \$5-40/rabbit

Cost of feed:

Show Rabbit Pellet Feed (1 bag): \$30 (National Brand Show Ration)

Timothy Hay (1 bag): \$20

Total cost of feed: \$50 (will likely feed 2 birds) \$25/rabbit

Cost of vet/health: \$20/rabbit (estimation but should be budgeted into figure)

Supplies: \$50/rabbit(Estimation but should be budgeted into figure)

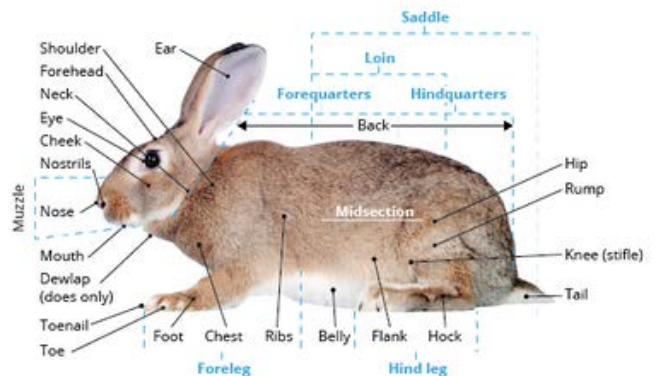
Total Cost: \$100-140/rabbit

Average Sale Price at 2023 Phillips County Fair: \$1000



Selecting a Rabbit

Do a health check to make sure the teeth are correct. Check to make sure they have all their toenails. Make sure the tail is straight. Make sure it does not have a hernia. Also make sure that the rabbit meets the breed characteristics set by the Standard of Excellence.



Sources and Resources

- <https://morrow.osu.edu/sites/morrow/files/imce/Raising%20Market%20Rabbits.pdf>
- <https://texasyouthlivestock.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Rabbit-Explore-Project-Guide.pdf>
- <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/vetscience/documents/clinical-skills/Rabbit%20Handling.pdf>
- <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/4h-31>
- https://ohio4h.org/sites/ohio4h/files/imce/animal_science/Rabbit%20Showmanship%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf

Produced by: Jessie Salyards, 4-H Specialist, Phillips County