

Housing Information

A **Rabbitry** is the term for the housing and operation of raising rabbits. It can be as simple as a few outdoor hutches in the backyard, or as elaborate as a full scale commercial operation such as us. Hobby breeders will fall somewhere in the middle.

The climate you live in will dictate what type of rabbitry you will have. Regions with mild winters can get by with an open style of rabbitry like a carport, shed or hutches. Cold regions, however, may require some type of heating and an enclosed building may be best. Cooling is also a concern in hot climates. Shade trees will help, but it may be necessary to enclose the structure.



WATER IN THIS PARTICULAR BUILDING IS SUPPLIED BY USING 55 GALLON BARRELS.

Fans or air-conditioning may be required. Another issue may be predators. You may need to include preventive measures that will keep them from getting to your rabbits. Once you've decided on what will serve as your rabbitry, you'll add the needed items, furnishings and cages that will house your rabbits. Personal preference, expense, and inventiveness will play a big role.

Whether you plan to keep your rabbits indoors or outdoors, keep in mind that they need plenty of light, fresh air and good ventilation. Ventilation is important in

reducing the incidence of disease and other health-related problems. A combination of urine, feces, and water on the ground can facilitate various diseases to become problems. The strong odor of urine can also irritate the esophagus and lung tissue of rabbits and humans.

Spreading hydrated lime or vinegar under the cages will help neutralize urine and its odor. Try to keep the manure under the cages cleaned out on a weekly basis. Fans blowing or pulling air across the rabbits will help reduce ammonia odors. Make sure no rain can get to the rabbits feed and try to keep strong winds off them.



ONE OF OUR 500' CHICKEN HOUSES IS USED FOR WORKING DOES AND HOLD-BACK STOCK WHILE THE OTHER IS USED FOR MANURE STORAGE AND BAGGED FERTILIZER SALES.

Regardless of your building choice, it should be structurally sound and should always be maintained. There shouldn't be a lot of noise coming from the sides or the roof. Rabbits do not like loud noises. It will help if the rabbitry is wired for electricity. Lights and outlets for heaters or fans will make your life easier.

Extension cords can be used but make sure it is a heavy gauge wire and safe. An important key to a successful rabbitry, after cleanliness, is keeping your building cool and keeping the rabbits comfortable. A rabbit's normal body temperature is 102°F to 103°F. The comfort zone for a rabbit is 60°F. When temperatures are above the comfort zone, rabbits will eat less and use more energy to remove heat from their bodies. Since rabbits don't perspire, they lose body heat through their breath and from air movement across their bodies.

A rabbit's ears will help regulate its body temperature. As its body temperature rises, the blood vessels in its ears expand and the blood flow through the ears increases. A rabbit's ears are usually long, large and have very short fur on the outside and almost no fur on the inside. This combination of increased blood flow and lack of fur means that more body heat can escape from a rabbit's ears than any other body part. With this knowledge, the temperature inside your building should be at least 10 degrees cooler than the outside temperature. This is sometimes very hard to do, especially in the southern states, but every attempt should be made..



All of our buildings have roll up poultry curtains on one side and 48" fans on the other. The curtains can be raised or lowered depending on the temperature and weather. The large fans help circulate and pull air across the rabbits, which helps cool them down and also helps pull out odors, ammonia and flies. It always helps if you keep your buildings cleaned out on a consistent basis.

Most people do not realize how much heat and ammonia the manure under the rabbit's cage puts out. Excess manure will also attract flies. **Believe it or not, the most dangerous animal in the world is the common house fly.** Because of their habit of visiting animal

waste, they transmit more diseases than any other creature. A scatter fly bait, that is merely thrown on the dry parts of the ground, will help with fly control.

You can get scatter fly bait in 40lb. pails and it goes a long way. We are never without scatter fly bait. Gnats can be controlled by putting apple cider vinegar with a dab of dish washing soap in a bowl. It helps if the bowl is white and placed on the ground versus up high. This takes a couple of days before working but it will help.

Insulation in the ceiling will also help keep the building cool. We have 2" thick insulation in our buildings, but now install 4" thick. Running a sprinkler line outside and down the center of the roof of your building can help. A landscape bubble hose can also work if your building is small. Both of these work well, but can be a little messy if you don't have good drain off for the excess water, plus can be costly if you're not using well water.

Stretching sun blocker shade material (like nursery cloth) over your roof can also help. Don't put the material directly on the roof. It should be 2-3 feet above it. It can be suspended with a metal, wood or cable system. It helps to have the cloth secured from the top and bottom to prevent flapping from the wind. This helps the cloth to last much longer. A good 90% shade cloth can keep 15 degrees off your roof. Be careful if you put this material over your side openings, as wind may have difficulty coming through it and you want good air circulation. For openings, use a 63% or less so air current can flow through.



OUR PLANTED EMPRESS TREES GREW 14 FEET IN TWELVE MONTHS. THEY CAN GROW TO 100' TALL.

The best overall way to keep the temperature down in your buildings is shade trees. We have just recently planted *Elongata Paulownia* or, also known as Empress trees, around our buildings. This is supposedly the fastest growing shade tree in the world and can grow 8-12 feet in a year. So far we have been impressed with its fast growth but we'll see if it's true in time.

On one of our buildings, we are now in the process of putting a second roof on top of the first roof. This should give twice the protection from the sun and also create dead air space. Hopefully this will cool our building down even more. This experiment will be costly, but we are determined to have our does perform just as well in the summer months as the rest of the year.

Years ago we tried swamp coolers, as they have been found to work very well up north. This is the large fans that blow out cool air and a slight water mist. They do work, however, in the southern states the humidity is too high and the swamp coolers will cause too much moisture in the air. Too much moisture in the air will cause mold problems in your feed, so please be very careful if you go this route. The humidity would have to be controlled to use these and this is even more difficult than controlling the temperature.

Other than air conditioning, which is usually not cost efficient, we've tried most ideas. However, we are going to try something new this spring. We'll let you know how it goes. We've found that your three best choices are shade trees, sun blocker shade cloth and fans (that pull air out or across the rabbits). Of course, if you are a small grower you can use frozen water bottles in each cage. This helps keep the rabbit cool. Many people will put wet towels or sacks over the cage but remember, keep an eye on the moisture during those humid days. Small growers can use inexpensive box fans angled from the ceiling. If you choose to spray your rabbits down, use room temperature water (not cold) and use a mist type hand held sprayer. You may also use a bucket and wash cloth to wipe the rabbit down. The main thing to remember is to keep a daily eye on the temperature in your building. Rabbits handle cold fairly well but heat is a real killer for them.

If the temperature does get above 85°F, New Zealand White rabbits may suffer from heat prostration. Heat prostration or heat strokes are very dangerous for a rabbit. High humidity (over 70%) can also increase the likelihood of a heatstroke. To predict the possibility of heatstroke, add the value of the temperature (°F) and the humidity (%).

If the sum is greater than 150, the situation is extremely dangerous. For example, 80°F plus a 70% humidity = 150, and this is a recipe for disaster. Overweight or excited rabbits and does that are about to kindle are most likely to develop heat prostration. Rabbits suffering from a heatstroke will usually have blue lips, tongue and ears. They will also have an increased heart and breathing rate with wet noses and mouths.

They may also pant heavily and have a frothy, blood-tinged discharge from the mouth. To treat for heatstroke: lower the rabbits temperature by wetting his ears, feet, and fur with cool (**not cold**) water. You may dip the rabbit in a bucket but keep its head out of the water. **NOTE:** Cooling must take place gradually.

Cooling too quickly or allowing the rabbits body temperature to become too low can cause other life-threatening medical conditions (See our Health remedies page). Putting the rabbit in a transport cage and placing it under a shade tree or in a cool area may also help. Again, temperature control in your building is very important, so do what ever it takes to keep it 10 degrees cooler inside than out.