

# All Ears in Sacramento

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**Contact Us:**

tel: (916) 863-9690  
fax: (916) 923-0536  
email:  
KMacinty@yahoo.com

[www.allearsac.org](http://www.allearsac.org)

Sacramento House  
Rabbit Society  
P.O. Box 13371  
Sacramento, CA 95813-0371



*Sammy reaps the rewards of his contribution to composting*

What do you do with your used bunny litter? Chances are that you throw it away in your outside trash can, and waste management comes and picks it up once a week. If you've got more than one bonded pair, change your litter box often, or have rabbits who demand lots of litter boxes, you may even have an extra large trash can (or two cans) for pickup each week.

Composting is an alternative that could save you money on your waste management bills, reduce the amount of stuff that ends up in landfills each year, and remove any squabbles you may be having with the garbage collector over the weight of your trash.

## What's in the Box?

If you look at the contents of the litter boxes you're dumping, you'll realize that everything in there – litter, hay, urine and bunny poop – is a great addition to a compost pile.

The litters recommended by the House Rabbit Society are all comprised of either compressed sawdust, wood pulp, recycled newspaper, or compressed grass. Since none of the

recommended litters have any additives, and all of these ingredients originate from either wood or grass, they will all compost nicely.

Hay is, of course, dried grass. Most composting literature recommends that grass clippings from your yard be dried slightly before adding them to the compost pile for two reasons: fresh grass clippings will generally compress, preventing proper aeration, and most compost piles need drier materials to balance out the moisture they gain from kitchen wastes. So, grass hay is a perfect component of a compost pile. The added bonus of grass hay is that, unlike shorter grass clippings, it provides aeration because it doesn't compress easily.

Then there's the urine. As odious as this stuff smells when it comes out of the rabbit, it's a great addition to a good smelling compost pile. A lot of compost piles suffer from a lack of nitrogen, which generally comes from green materials (fresh grass or leaves). Since the litter adds lots of carbon with almost no nitrogen, rabbit urine helps to balance out the

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**SHRS Manager**  
Kirsten Macintyre

**Newsletter Editor**  
Kirsten Macintyre

**Newsletter Design**  
HareLine Graphics

Letters to the editor and newsletter submissions may be sent to:

Sacramento House Rabbit Society  
P.O. Box 13371  
Sacramento, CA 95813-0371

tel: (916) 863-9690  
fax: (916) 923-0536

email:  
KMacinty@yahoo.com

Website:  
www.alllearssac.org

**Drop us a line! We welcome your submissions to *All Ears in Sacramento*. If you live in the Sacramento area and have story ideas, photos, illustrations, or article topics, send them to the address above. We can't return items, so please do not send originals.**

input of the other materials.

Finally, there's the obvious ingredient: bunny poop. Anyone who has done organic gardening knows that composted cow and chicken manure make for great fertilizers and soil conditioners. The catch is that the feces must come from vegetarian animals. Microorganisms present in the digestive tract of species that eat meat should not be introduced to the compost pile, so you can't dispose of dog or cat feces this way. Bunny feces is great for a compost pile – it's a good source of carbon, and has a reasonable carbon-nitrogen ratio for the microorganisms.

## But What About the Smell?

Contrary to most logic, the waste degrading in your compost pile doesn't smell bad. For example, when I first started composting, my husband objected to the idea of a pile of rotting organic materials right outside the back door. He thought the odor and the flies would waft into the house. I somehow managed to convince him that I know what I'm doing. Years later, the compost bin is still located right outside the back door. In fact, a compost pile that is far away from where you are getting the material will discourage you from using it. The only time that compost piles have problems is when they are not composting. This can happen before the pile has sufficient volume to begin "cooking" or if the balance of compost ingredients (carbon, nitrogen, water, air, and microorganisms) is off.

Beyond bunny litter, you can add other organics to your bin to compost and reduce the recyclable trash you throw out. The general rule is that if it didn't come from an animal, it can go into the bin. There are, of course, exceptions. Feces and urine from vegetarian species are acceptable, as are egg shells (they don't need to be washed first). You should not add fats (like vegetable oils) to your pile.

## Sounds Great, But Where Do I Start?

The first thing you will need is someplace to put your compost. There are two commonly used types of containers: open-air and closed-air bins (see chart).

Once you've decided on a bin, you need to decide where to put it. Locate it somewhere convenient for emptying your litter trays, and toting your kitchen wastes. If you're using a closed-air bin, placing it somewhere with regular sunlight will help regulate its temperature. Now you can start adding the ingredients. Compost literature often discusses layering ingredients. However, this is rarely practical. When you put something in, distribute it over the top of the existing materials. To get started, dump in your litter box wastes and any kitchen scraps. Then add a layer of soil or (preferably) composted material (like organic compost or composted manure). This will supply the microorganisms for your compost. Then keep adding stuff. When adding bunny litter remains, you will need to add a significant amount of water. Compost should be

BIN TYPE	MATERIALS	ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES
Open Air	Commercially available as black plastic that is unrolled, and ends fastened together to form a cylinder. Simple bins can be constructed of wire mesh. More complex multi-bin systems are often constructed with wooden frames and hardware cloth sides. This system also works with just making a pile of waste.	<i>Advantages:</i> Inexpensive, easy to build. <i>Disadvantages:</i> The volume of material is more critical in an open-air compost pile. Some action must be taken to prevent too much water from entering the pile in the winter, and more water needs to be added in the summer. Generally unattractive.
Closed Air	Commercially available as green plastic structures with easily removable lid panels for access. Bins can also be made by ventilating old drums or garbage cans. These systems aren't completely closed, and still need air to work.	<i>Advantages:</i> Fewer issues with volume and water control. While not winning any home decorating awards the containers are reasonably unobtrusive. <i>Disadvantages:</i> Expensive.

## RESOURCES

There are numerous books available about composting. Local resources include:

The **UC Davis Cooperative Extension** has numerous articles on composting. These can be found at:

[http://ceplacer.ucdavis.edu/Custom\\_Program219/Compost\\_ing\\_Overview.htm?§=117](http://ceplacer.ucdavis.edu/Custom_Program219/Compost_ing_Overview.htm?§=117).

**City of Sacramento Department of Public Works** Free compost bins. (916) 264-7043

**City of West Sacramento** Free compost information and bins. (916) 373-5810

<http://www.ci.west-sacramento.ca.us/cityhall/departments/finance/recycling/composting/default.cfm>

**Sacramento County** (including Citrus Heights Residents) Free compost workshops and bins. (916) 363 9690

<http://www.sacgreenteam.com/documents/2001%20Workshops.pdf>

moist enough that a handful, when squeezed will produce a few drops of water. It should not be saturated though. The absorbency of the litter that makes it a great material for litter means that it takes water to make it moist enough to compost. (I have to say that I've never picked up my compost material, pre-composting, and squeezed it to check the moisture. I just poke at it.)

At some point, your pile will get a significant amount of material in it, and it will need to be turned to mix the microbes into the newer material at the top of the pile. This can be done with a pitchfork or (more easily) with a compost stirrer. Then it's just a matter of adding, watering, stirring, and waiting. Eventually, your compost pile will be full, and you'll have to get a second bin. Depending on how rapidly your compost is cooking, you'll have a couple weeks to a couple months after you add the last material until it's ready to use. In the meantime, you'll be adding new material to your second bin.

### Now What Do I Do With It?

Homemade compost is excellent fertilizer for vegetable and bunny gardens. If your first pile is done early next spring, you can plant some lettuces and herbs for your bunnies, and fertilize them with your compost. Since we're all concerned about the chemicals our rabbits ingest, home-grown vegetables with your organic fertilizer are great food. Plus, the bunny waste has gone full circle at that point. You can also give your compost to your gardening neighbors and be assured that you'll get a gift from their harvest this year.

—Anne Miller



# BIG-TIME BUNNY PROOFING

**Y**ou probably already know about covering electrical cords with plastic tubing, moving your house plants out of Thumper's reach, and having plenty of approved bunny chew toys around. Those precautions will keep a lot of bunnies happy and out of trouble.

But what if Thumper is a little more determined than the average rabbit? What if you have taken all the basic precautions, and he still finds ways to cause mischief – or danger to himself and damage to your house? Then it's time to take your bunny-proofing to the next level.

## First Things First

Because different rabbits like to participate in different activities, it is important to get to know which behaviors your rabbit likes to engage in. One of my foster bunnies loved to jump up to high places – the desk, the bookshelf – and nibble on what she found up there. Another foster bunny didn't care about high places at all, but liked to dig at the carpet. Each of these situations requires a different bunny-proofing strategy.

Sometimes unwanted behaviors can be eliminated simply by moving Thumper's play space to another part of the house, or by blocking off some areas using baby gates. If there is something in a room that your bunny can't keep her

paws (or teeth) off of – an expensive rug, a sofa – this is the simplest way to resolve the issue.

Some behaviors continue no matter where Thumper lives. If that is the case, then it's time to tackle the problem more precisely.

## Barriers

Rabbits are diggers by nature, and some bunnies really enjoy working on the carpet. This can be dismaying when you notice carpet fibers being pulled up! Edges and corners of rooms are the usual target. The best solution is to put down a carpet square. Carpet squares (samples) are easily found at carpet showrooms and hardware, home improvement and discount stores. Now, you may have tried this and found the carpet square scooted aside. However, you can place a river rock on top of the carpet square to keep it stable. Not only will this stop the digging and keep the square in place, but it may quickly become a favorite resting place for your bunny. There seems to be some kind of Zen vibe from the rock that bunnies respond to – try it!

Sometimes there is just one corner of the room that is the problem – behind the TV stand, or under the sofa. I suggest keeping a store of Neat Ideas Cubes around, because they can be used in so many ways. These cubes are available at office supply and warehouse stores. They consist of 12" gridded metal squares that can be snapped together with plastic connectors to create storage cubes (their intended purpose). In the world of bunny-proofing, they can be zip-tied together (and to furniture) to

*TV-stand Trifecta:  
River rock, carpet squares  
and zip-tied Neat Ideas  
cubes protect both  
carpeting and electronics.*



### Bunny-Proofing Basics

Are you new to bunny-proofing or need a refresher course on the basics? Log onto:

<http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/rabbit-proofing.html>

create effective barriers.

If you have an unusual area you want to block, or don't like the look of the cubes, plexiglass barriers are a good alternative. These can be custom built to fit the space (Tap Plastics is a local supplier), and they are practically invisible. If Thumper has taken a liking to your walls or wallpaper, plexiglass sheets can be attached to the wall (or leaned against it and anchored by river rocks).

## Scents

Rabbits have sensitive noses, and that can come in handy when you are trying to bunny-proof. Has Thumper sampled your baseboards or doors? Try running a bar of Irish Spring soap along the edge. That will usually send Thumper hopping in the opposite direction! Other scents that are worth trying are perfume, and commercial scent products (such as Bitter Apple) marketed towards stopping cats and dogs from marking and chewing. (Be forewarned, though, that scents affect different rabbits in different ways, and this solution doesn't work for all rabbits. One of my foster bunnies tried to take a bite out of the bar of Irish Spring while I was applying it to a baseboard! Needless to say, I had to take a different approach with him.)

Using scents to stop behavior is a temporary solution; after awhile the scent dissipates and Thumper may be back. However, sometimes all you need to do is to distract your rabbit temporarily. She may forget about the tempting baseboard and not come back!

## Diversions

So you put a cardboard box in the corner, and Thumper hasn't touched it. Now what? It may be time to pull out all the stops. A cardboard box may only elicit a yawn, but what if there is a cardboard box, twigs, a willow tunnel, towels, a Yellow Pages phone book, and a slinky? If you want to distract your bunny and get her to play with approved toys, you might need to pile it on! A big pile of toys under the sofa is out of sight to humans, but a wonder-



land to bunnies. As the toys start to creep out from under the furniture, just push them back and rearrange them – that will keep Thumper occupied for hours.

Bunnies also need a change of pace once in awhile, to keep them from misbehaving out of boredom. I have a wonderful cardboard bunny castle, which, just like Brigadoon, only appears once in a great while. It is a huge hit when it is available – my bunnies scramble up and down it, do a little “remodeling” inside of it – but after a couple of days, it disappears again. If it were available to them at all times, they might soon grow tired of it. Its mysterious appearance is the appeal.

## Bunnies are Bunnies

Remember, your bunny is not misbehaving just to vex you. She is exhibiting normal rabbit behavior. If you tailor your bunny proofing to your bunny's personality, and to the specific behavior and place, you will have much more success in keeping both of you happy.

–Jill Walker

*Top Left: The human view of Bunny Wonderland.*

*Top Right: Removing the chair exposes Paloma enjoying her heap of toys.*

*Left: Essential bunny-proofing supplies to have on hand: carpet squares, river rocks, scent detractors.*

# We've Got Mail!

Linda Thomas's bunny, Percy, demonstrates how helpful he can be in bringing in the mail. He doesn't lick stamps, though.



The House

Rabbit Society does not advocate dressing your rabbit up in clothing, but if your rabbit dresses himself up, what can you do but take a picture? John and Phyllis Moist grabbed their camera when their lop, Hoagie, pulled a cape off a stuffed bear and then managed to slip it over his shoulders. Hoagie paraded around the living room with the cape on for quite a while, much to John and Phyllis's amusement. That's Hoagie's mate, Lassie, watching in the background and perhaps wondering where she can get a fancy coat like that.

## SHRS Goodies

Our popular **SHRS t-shirts**, featuring delightful illustrations by SHRS member Shannon Hawkins (see below), are still available for purchase. Sizes available are \_\_\_ in natural and \_\_\_ in navy. \$15

Back by popular demand is the **"Everything I Need to Know" poster**, featuring local rabbits. 12 x 36 inches, \$12.

Also available is the **"Kids-n-Bunnies" coloring book**, full of information about house rabbit care and fun pages to color. \$2 (shipping and handling \$1.50 per coloring book\*).

Come by our monthly clinics to see them in person, or use this form to order by mail.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

ITEM	COLOR	SIZE	QUANTITY	TOTAL
shipping & handling*:				
total:				

Please mail completed form with check or money order (payable to Sacramento House Rabbit Society) to:  
Sacramento House Rabbit Society, P.O. Box 13371, Sacramento, CA 95813-0371

\*SAVE on shipping & handling charges when buying in quantity!  
1-3 items ordered is \$4.00 s&h    4-6 items ordered is \$8.00 s&h, etc.  
if ordering only coloring books, shipping & handling is \$1.50 per book.

allow 2-3 weeks for delivery

# Rabbits Available for Adoption



**Velvet** is a female rabbit who is very loving and playful.



**Elderberry** is a boy who enjoys exploring his surroundings. He loves to be petted on the nose.



**Zorro** is a young boy who loves to be petted. He is very friendly, extremely curious about everything, and too busy to be held for long!



**Beatrix** is a fun-loving, easygoing bunny who loves to spend time with her human friends.

## Recent Adoptions

Carol Sorrels adopted **Cassidy** as her first bunny companion.

**Dorothy** was adopted by Ellen Johnson and her family.

Brother and sister bunnies **Brandon** and **Penney** were adopted by Joyce Mancini



**Lotto** is a quiet, mature boy who like to be petted. He is curious, but cautious.



**Damon** is an fun, active young Lop boy.



**Pierre** is an energetic and curious young male.

## Upcoming Events

### Adoption and Information Clinics

Are you thinking about adding a bunny to your household? Or are you just looking to learn more about the one you've already got? Regardless of whether you've had a rabbit for years or if you're new to the joys of rabbit companionship, you'll have a great time at our monthly Adoption and Information Clinics. Come ask us questions about bunny behavior, care, grooming, nutrition, or anything else you can think of. We have free printed information on a variety of topics, and, of course, we also have our fabulous fosters on hand, waiting for just the right family to come along! The adoption donation is \$50 (\$75 for two), and includes a copy of *The House Rabbit Handbook*.

If you already have a bunny, you're welcome to bring him or her to the Clinic in a secure carrier. Our experienced "rabbit wranglers" can trim your rabbit's nails for a \$5 donation. We've recently added a new service as well – de-tangling matted bunny fur. If your rabbit has stubborn knots that you just can't get out, call our bunny line in advance (916-863-9690) and make arrangements to bring him to the Clinic for a makeover. We have clippers, combs, and lots of patience. Donations of \$10 per hour are appreciated!

**May 11**

**10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Davis PetCo

1341 West Covell

**June 8**

**10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Folsom PetCo

879 East Bidwell.

**July 13**

**10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Fair Oaks PetCo

8840 Madison Avenue

**August 10**

**10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Arden PetCo

1878 Arden Way

## Bunnysitters

The SHRS keeps a list of local people who are interested in bunnysitting for a fee or for a sitting exchange arrangement. Rates and experience vary, so please make sure you are personally comfortable with your bunnysitter, and ask for references. The SHRS provides this list as a service, and holds no liability for bunnysitters. If you would like to have your name added to this list, contact us at (916) 863-9690.

### Bunnysitter Exchange

Karen Blaine.....726-4637

Danny Popp.....966-7805

SteviLynn

Saunders.....344-8917

### Sacto Bunnysitters

Animeals.....646-4663

Christine John .....722-5301

Bonni McMurray...451-6389

### Folsom to Foothill Bunnysitters

Brian Barry...(530) 644-7387

Ravilla Irvin ..(530) 676-2273

Charlene Welty .....933-0530

### Elk Grove Area Bunnysitters

Wanda

Turner.....(209) 933-0895

Bring your bunny to any Clinic for a \$5 nail trim - no appointment necessary!



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membership  
 expiration date



**Not a Member?**

Sacramento House Rabbit Society depends on donations to keep running. Please fill out the form below to keep receiving *All Ears in Sacramento*, and to support local rabbits in need!

**Keep in Touch!**

Time to renew your membership? New to the House Rabbit Society? The annual membership to the House Rabbit Society is \$18. This includes a subscription to the quarterly *House Rabbit Journal*. The annual membership fee for the Sacramento Chapter, which includes the quarterly *All Ears in Sacramento*, is \$15. The House Rabbit Society is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. All membership fees are tax-deductible and go towards care expenses for the rabbits and for providing educational materials, such as these newsletters.

- Please sign me up for the National Membership, \$18
- Please sign me up for the Sacramento Membership, \$15
- Please sign me up for both for \$30
- I have enclosed an additional donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_
- I would like to volunteer with SHRS (see choices to the right)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

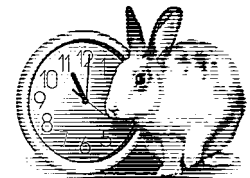
email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Return with check payable to House Rabbit Society to:  
 Sacramento House Rabbit Society, P.O. Box 13371, Sacramento, CA 95813-0371

**Volunteer!**

Would you like to help local rabbits and bunny-lovers? We could use volunteers in the following areas:

- Public Events (staffing education tables)
- Fundraising Events
- Distributing Literature
- Working with Shelters
- Transporting rabbits to the National Headquarters in Richmond
- Fostering



**HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY**