

Quarterly News from the
Sacramento House Rabbit Society

All Ears in Sacramento

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Rabbit-Friendly Gardening

A do-it-yourself guide to bumper backyard crops

Since the days of Peter and Mr. McGregor, rabbits and gardening have been closely associated. Today, we live in the suburbs and shop at the grocery store, so we don't often stop to consider how a backyard garden might enhance our lives – and the lives of our bunnies. Now that economic times are tough, perhaps it's time to take a cue from the old storybooks and consider turning to nature to provide healthy, homegrown food for our family members (both two-legged and four-legged).

Keeping a small kitchen garden really doesn't take much effort, and is one obvious way to reduce grocery costs for you and your rabbits. Home gardening also allows for diversity that isn't available commercially. Stores stock their produce according to what transports well and has long shelf life, thus they carry "vegetables" like iceberg lettuce, which is sturdy but tasteless and has almost no nutritional value. On the other hand, when you clip a couple of home-grown romaine or endive leaves, you're getting nutrients at

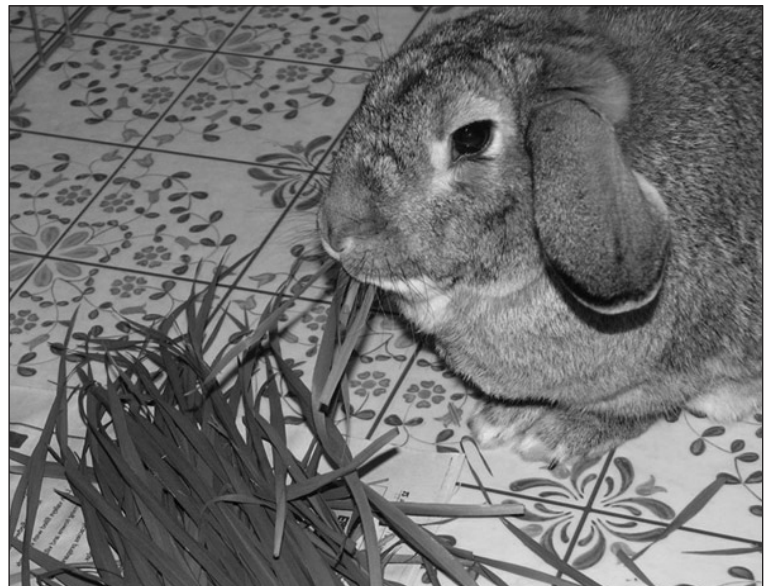
their peak. No pesticides or chemical fertilizers have come in contact with your food – it's uncontaminated, fresh and healthy.

Home gardening is feasible for almost anyone. Plastic pots filled with potting soil are sufficient for apartment gardening. Wide plastic mortar mixing tubs, which are a little larger and can be set on a porch or balcony, can be found at home improvement stores. Leafy greens have shallow roots so containers provide ample growing area.

If you have room to plant outdoors, consider building raised beds, which allow you to easily bend over to access your plants. You can make bed frames out of brick or boards (but never use treated wood that may come in

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Chestnut enjoys blades of oat grass.



*Houdini kicks back
on the living room side
of the Rabbitat*

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*The Rabbitat's closet
enclosure provides privacy*



Over four years ago, my husband Dave and I started a home remodel. We stayed in the house but lived out of just one bedroom during that time. We kept all the essentials there: microwave, refrigerator, toaster oven, computer, radio, a table, and two chairs. Houdini, our sweet house rabbit, now eight years old, lived under the table on a five by seven foot banana leaf rug.

Because we were doing the house redesign (and some of the remodel work) ourselves, we thought it the perfect opportunity to include in the plans a space for Houdini. Since we enjoy his companionship so much, we wanted his space open to the family room. We also wanted to give him a place to retreat in case things got too hectic. In that space, we could

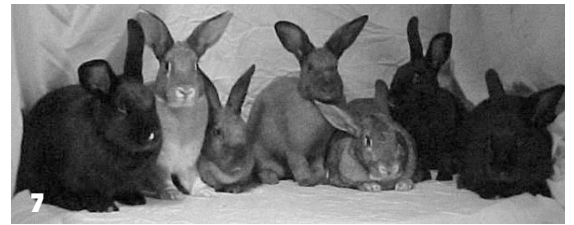
also keep his litter box, timothy hay, and other necessities for rabbit care out of sight.

First, Dave took a photo of the family room wall before the sheetrock was installed in order to identify the location of studs and wires. After all remodel construction was complete, he cut a six-inch square opening in the sheetrock above the baseboard. He then cut another opening the same size on the opposite side of the wall in a large closet. He made a quarter-inch thick plywood box with open ends that fit snugly through the opening in the wall. He nailed wooden blocks made from a two-by-four under and to the sides of the plywood box to secure it firmly in the wall. We glued decorative molding around the opening and painted it with nontoxic paint to match the baseboards. The final step was customization by Houdini, who chewed on the molding to make it his own.

On the family room side, Dave built a platform for stereo equipment with a wide-arched opening. The platform backs up against the six-inch square hole to Houdini's personal space in the closet. Most of the time Houdini relaxes beneath the platform, looking very decorative in the archway next to his pinecone toys. We think this arrangement makes the perfect rabbitat.



Rabbits Available for Adoption



7. Our names (left to right) are **Mimi, Rosie, Smudge, Pudge, Oscar, Napoleon, and Peanut.** Five girls and two boys. We were rescued from the same location and have grown up as a family (or herd, in rabbit language). Oscar is our fearless leader and Mimi likes to act like a mom to all of us. We are spayed and neutered. Our foster mom said it would be most unlikely we would all find a forever home together...but that we could be adopted as pairs or more to very special homes. Thank goodness we all get along and take care of each other!



1. Misty needs a caring home due to a previous health challenge. She is a stable and very sweet girl who loves to be held.



2. Eleu is a male mini-rex who loves to play with toys.



5. Sophie was one of a bonded pair, until she decided she wanted all the attention for herself! She is a very sweet and curious girl.



8. Baby and Hana are a friendly, mischievous bonded pair who like adults and children. Baby is a curious brown girl and Hana is a sweet Californian who likes to sit on laps.

9. Mickey and Willow are a wonderful bonded pair for an experienced bunny home. Mikey is a beautiful blue-eyed white bunny, and Willow is a Jersey-Wooly mix.

10. Dakota likes being petted and held. She has good litter box habits. *See her full profile in the Foster Spotlight on page 6!*



3. Rhett Bunnler is an active male. He enjoys digging and shredding the yellow pages. He likes to be held and petted, but only after he has had a chance to race around and get his exercise.



4. Elvira is an active adult girl. She has great litterbox habits. She enjoys attention and being held.

Recent Adoptions

Mikey and Delilah were adopted by the Kleinman family

Hoppy Gilmore was adopted by the Johnson family

Cole was adopted by Marla and Robert Erickson as a pal for their bunny Nettie

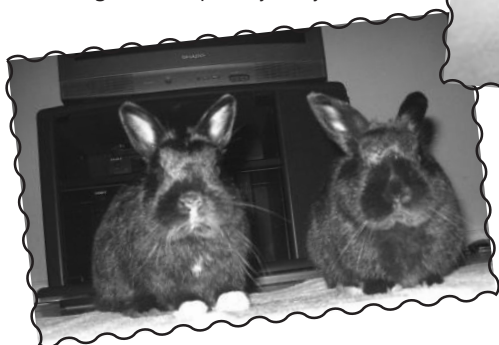
Star, Joey and Lilly were adopted by Thelma and Steve Jones

Hobart Van Gogh was adopted by Emily Jacobson



Mikey and Delilah get close

Hobart Van Gogh has found his forever home



Nettie and Cole are happy together, no matter how disapproving they look



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Rabbit-Friendly Gardening

continued from page 1

contact with food you will eat). Experts recommend that beginning gardeners plant no more than a four by eight foot area their first year. If possible, you should prepare the area one season ahead by watering the soil to germinate the weeds. Then you can easily kill the weeds without using herbicide on your crops.

Sacramento soil is typically heavy clay, meaning that it clumps together easily and becomes rock-like when it's dry. Here's where your bunnies can help out – you can mix in old rabbit litter and wood stove pellets, or add amendments like vermiculite or gypsum to keep the soil more porous.

Next, you should design your garden. The old stereotype of long rows of vegetables is impractical for most people these days. *The Sacramento Bee* ran a wonderful series last year about the "Square Foot" gardening method, which involves planting crops in a uniform grid based on their mature size (one head of lettuce takes up the same amount of space as four carrots). This enables you to get the most out of your garden space.

Also be sure you diversify your crops. There's a practical reason for this. The rows and rows of fruit or nut trees you see in

orchards off the freeway are an example of "monoculture," which doesn't exist naturally. The tree-only farmer needs to apply lots of pesticides and fertilizer to make up for the loss of beneficial insects and plants. The same principle applies to a backyard garden. The practice of "Companion Gardening" minimizes the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides by grouping plants that protect each other from pests. For instance, chives, cilantro and onions attract insects helpful to carrots. Fennel and dill repel insects that feed on leafy greens. Rosemary, which grows year-round, will attract bees that will pollinate your other plants and contribute to a plentiful garden through all four seasons. If you choose a balanced assortment of plants, you will spend less time and money fighting nature, and you'll be able to use it to your advantage.

In gardening, timing is everything. Right now is the perfect time to plant "cool" crops such as broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, peas, beets, lettuce, spinach and radishes. If growing from seed, they should be planted before the first frost. If growing from transplants, just plant when they are available from the garden shops. (We have a lot of latitude in the Central Valley compared to zones that freeze and get snow. My lazy method is to leave some veggies from last year and knock the seeds off the dead plants. They sprout after the fall rains. I am getting my second year pea and romaine crop this way.)

Another rabbit favorite, parsley, can also be transplanted now (late winter). Be sure to get the flat-leaf variety that is great in soups and stews. It lives two years before dying and producing seeds. Bundles of parsley in the supermarkets can range anywhere from 50 cents to a dollar, so if you buy a lot of parsley for your bunnies, this is one of the most cost-saving plants you can grow.

When buying plants for your home garden, always choose the variety you don't see in markets so you can try a different flavor of the veggie. Also try heirloom varieties, which are

Yard full of free range oat grass



not as crossbred as the commercial varieties. They have different colors, shapes, and flavors.

Finally, don't overlook "unusual" food sources for your bunnies. I stumbled upon a great food for my rabbits by accident. The leftover oat hay I tossed into the compost pile in the fall had sprouted into a tall, deep-green grass by the following spring. My rabbits couldn't get enough of the stuff. A year after feeding them all the oat grass I could find, their vet was surprised to find that their developing tooth points had disappeared and they were in perfect dental health. It turns out that the fresh grass is more abrasive than hay and contains active enzymes that help wear down rabbits' teeth. It is actually more natural and healthier for them to eat the fresh oat grass than the hay that comes from it.

I also planted seedless grapes for fruit and as a landscape feature. I soon discovered that rabbits love grape leaves even more than oat grass (humans enjoy stuffed grape leaves, such as in Greek or Turkish dolmades, but it's not something we might think to grow for our rabbits). This is another example of how both you and your bunny can both reap the benefits of a home garden. You can be creative in addition to being healthy, frugal and environmentally conscious!

– Brandon Chee

If you buy a lot of parsley for your bunnies, this is one of the most cost-saving plants you can grow.



Vegetables by the Month

Wondering what to plant in your garden that will be enjoyed by humans and rabbits alike? We have some tried-and-true suggestions that not only thrive in the Sacramento Valley, but have already earned a "paws up" vote from Brandon's bunnies.

Carrots (seeds), February to April or August to September

Celery (transplants), June to August

Cucumbers (seeds or transplants), March to June

Lettuce (seeds or transplants), February to April or August to September

Radishes (seeds), February to April or August to October

Spinach (seeds), September to April

Watermelon (seeds or transplants), March to June

References:

Bartholomew, Mel. *Square Foot Gardening*. Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 1981.

Cunningham, Sally Jean. *Great Garden Companions*. Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 1998.

Run for the Buns

Coming Soon to a T-Shirt Near You!

It's that time of year again! In just a few weeks, our very own limited-edition "Run for the Buns 2009" t-shirts will be available for sale.

These colorful shirts come in children's (\$12) and adult (\$20) sizes. To get your very own, sign up for the March 29 fun run in Midtown Sacramento (see the insert in this newsletter for details!). One t-shirt is included with every individual entry, and two t-shirts are included with a family entry. If you can't make it to the run, stop by an upcoming adoption day, where they will be available while supplies last (starting in April). We look forward to many bunny supporters "hopping to it" and enjoying a fun day of exercise while helping bunnies in need in the Sacramento area.



FOSTER SPOTLIGHT

Free "Dental Day" to Return Later this Year

The SHRS would like to thank Dr. Joseph of the Roseville Bird and Pet Clinic for the truly inspired "free rabbit mouth check day" sponsored by her practice in January. So many rabbit health problems are connected to dental issues; an annual checkup can catch a tooth spur, injury or malocclusion long before it's causing your bunny great discomfort. Dr. Joseph says they'll probably try to do it three times a year, so watch this space in future newsletters for the when and where!

Shy, sweet Dakota and her brother were brought into the city animal shelter as strays. Her brother was adopted right away, leaving Dakota alone. Because she was so frightened of people, shelter staff weren't sure she was adoptable. SHRS chose her for this very reason, and after a lot of time and love, she is beginning to respond. She will "stand up" to get her favorite treats, and will approach people and put her paws on them as long as they make no sudden movements. She loves her chew toys and putting "stuff" in her water dish for entertainment. She doesn't mind walking on a leash, but she loves her freedom – just wait 'til you see her bunny binkies! Are you the one who will make Dakota's personality bloom?



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. We do offer nail trims for a \$5 donation, but please call our hotline at least 48 hours in advance to set an appointment time (so we'll be sure to have someone available for you!). Please also bring your own, sterilized clippers. Grooming and de-matting services are also available outside of Clinic hours, but by appointment only. Call our hotline for more information.

March 14

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

April 11

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Citrus Heights PetCo
6067 Greenback Lane

May 9

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Arden PetCo
1878 Arden Way

June 13

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

Seeking Bunny Sweethearts!

Valentine's Day may be over, but love is still in the air. If you live with a single bunny, have you thought about adopting a companion for him or her? Rabbits are very social animals that usually enjoy company and

form deep, permanent bonds with their special bunny friends.

This coming adoption day we are inviting everyone who thinks their bunny would like to find a friend to stop by for tips or help on bonding their rabbits. Our experienced bunny matchmakers will carefully help you and your bunny find a new forever friend.

You can bring your own couple who may be having difficulties being together for counseling. Or, you can bring your bunny to choose a new friend from our eligible foster rabbits.

Our two most important requirements are (1) a loving home, and (2) that your rabbit be spayed or neutered prior to any bunny "dating." Altering reduces hormonal aggression, and makes your bunny a more enjoyable pet. And for girl rabbits, spaying eliminates the 90% chance of developing uterine cancer in her lifetime.



Check out our new location!

SHRS is adding a new location to its rotating adoption days. We will be working with the Citrus Heights PetCo at 6067 Greenback Lane, which is a more central location. We will no longer be holding adoption days at the Folsom PetCo. We hope this is convenient for everyone, and look forward to seeing you there.



Sacramento House Rabbit Society
 P.O. Box 19850
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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! *SHRS does not sell or share our member's information with any other organizations or companies.*

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 \$20. 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, \$20
- Please sign me up for both for \$35
- I have enclosed an additional donation of \$_____
- My employer _____ will match my donation to SHRS

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

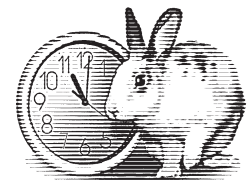
email address: _____

*Return with check payable to House Rabbit Society to:
 Sacramento House Rabbit Society, P.O. Box 19850, Sacramento, CA 95819-0850*

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 shelter rabbits to local adoption days
- Fostering



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