

Can Your Rabbit Beat the Heat?

Summer brings a variety of situations, including hotter temperatures and longer days, which affect the well being of your outdoor rabbit. There are steps you should take to prepare your rabbit(s) to weather the season in optimal health and comfort.

First and foremost - water is very important in the summer. It is critical to keep the rabbit's source of water clean and **not** stagnant. In very hot weather, this may necessitate checking the water several times a day or providing an automatic waterer. If you use the latter, be sure to still clean it regularly to inhibit bacterial growth and keep the water appealing to the rabbit. Also be sure that the rabbit cannot chew any cords or temporary water lines.

Another important factor in summertime rabbit management is proper ventilation. Proper air movement will not only prevent the buildup of odors and ammonia, but it will also help reduce both ambient temperatures and excess humidity. If possible orientate hutches or open buildings to take advantage of typical prevailing breezes. During stagnant conditions, supplemental fans can be used to provide for increased air circulation.

Your rabbit should have a hutch that has at least one solid wall and a slanted, overhanging roof that will allow rain to run off. The hutch should be placed in an area protected from direct sun and heavy precipitation. It is very important that you check your rabbit daily to ensure it has a **dry** environment. Damp surroundings, whether from rain, a leaky water bottle, or urine, will contribute to chilling and immune stress, which can easily result in serious illness. While well protected, the hutch should still have adequate ventilation to reduce odors and keep your pet breathing fresh air.

If you are breeding rabbits, you will need to provide 14 to 16 hours of light during these hot summer days. Even during the longer daylight hours of summer, providing supplemental lighting will provide a more consistent light level that can allow for proper breeding. The lighting intensity should be 25 lux at the level of the animals. Since no one really knows what a lux is, simply hang one 36-watt fluorescent tube light about 6 feet above the rabbits for every 55 square feet of floor space. Remember that, baby rabbits cannot tolerate the temperatures that adult rabbits can, and they may still need to provide extra warmth if needed. If you provide supplemental heat, be sure to monitor the temperature of the nest box daily. There have been instances where the nest box gets too hot and doe's do not nurse the litter. Remember, a little heat goes a long way in a small nest box.

Finally, expect your outdoor rabbits to eat less! The hotter it gets, the less the rabbit wants to eat. Yet rabbits still need protein, energy, vitamins and minerals that come from professionally formulated rabbit diets. In fact, two Florida show enthusiasts feed and recommend Purina Mills Professional Formula for their Mini-Rex rabbits. **Carl Summerall of Astatula and Jim Rowland of Lakeland** use this feed for the higher protein and consistency. "We find that the higher protein found in Purina's Professional Formula works great on our show rabbits," said Jim.

“They tend to eat a little less when it’s hot, so it’s critical they get a consistent feed with everything they need to look their best on the show table. In fact, we have already won four Best In Shows this year across Florida and the Southeast. When we travel to shows with our rabbits, people are amazed rabbits from Florida can have such great fur. Purina works for us.”

If you provide your rabbit with proper ventilation, dry housing, plenty of Purina Mills Rabbit Chow products, and lots of fresh, clean water, your rabbit will stay comfortable and healthy through even the longest summer!