



KIT CARE

*By Dave Mangione
The Ohio State University*

Healthy kits = Healthy rabbits. It all starts with proper nest box management. The day newly born kits arrive is the day kit care begins.

Let's back up and begin with the nest box. It is extremely important to have a nest box which is appropriate in size, design and construction. Nest boxes for a New Zealand, should be 11" long, 8" wide and 9" high sides and back with a 6" front. As far as design, I prefer open top boxes which are cooler in the summer and better ventilated for all seasons. Nest boxes can be made from several materials including wood (non-treated), metal or wire. Metal boxes are easy to sanitize but can be cold in the winter and warm in the summer. Nest boxes constructed out of floor wire again are easy to sanitize and provide a cool environment for summer litters but are not practical to use during the winter months. Wood boxes on the other hand are suitable for all seasons except that wood can harbor bacteria and create a diseased environment for new kits. While a bleach solution will sanitize most nest boxes, wooden boxes should be cleaned and then placed outside in direct sunlight for 3-4 days. Direct sunlight is the best sanitizer and it is free!

What type of nesting material should I provide to the doe? There are several types of bedding material including straw, hay, pine shavings and shredded newspaper. Straw and pine shavings are the most popular and can be used alone or in combination. I prefer pine shavings; however either choice will provide adequate material for the doe to make her nest.

Once the kits are born, nest box sanitation is extremely important! A poorly managed nest box can lead to; nest box eyes, pastorella infections and sudden kit death. Immediately after or within a day of newly arrived kits, provide a clean nest box with fresh bedding material. Place the fresh bedding material in the nest box and place your fist on top of the bedding material toward the rear of the box. Make a hole in the shape of a bowl by twisting your fist back and forth. Take the kits from their original nest and place in the new nest and cover them with fur from the original nest. Place the clean nest box with kits back with the doe. The doe will not mind nor will she harm the kits. Some first litter does are somewhat anxious so moving quietly and slowly will ease her concern. If a doe is that aggressive and harms her kits, she should be culled from the herd. Every ten days after birth, the nesting material should be replaced with fresh shavings and/or straw.

At four weeks of age, I recommend replacing the nest box with a nursery box. This box is the size of a nest box but with 3"- 4" high sides. The nursery box gives a place for the bunnies to feel safe and provides a healthy environment that is well ventilated. POORLY MANAGED NEST BOXES BECOME AMMONIA CHAMBERS! This can be the pre-cursor for snuffles as well as other health problems as the rabbit matures.

So take care of those spring litters and good luck at the shows!