

KEEP YOUR BUNNIES BUSY!

It's not only dogs and cats that like playing and being kept active – rabbits also get enormous fun from learning little tricks and stunts. Give it a try! The experts from the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo tell you how it's done.

Rabbits can become thoroughly bored when they have to sit in their hutch or cage day in, day out, with nothing to do other than sleep and eat. They desperately need to run around outside to keep fit, healthy and happy. You can make this exciting for them by including a few little routines. In the wild, rabbits ultimately have their own tasks to accomplish: they range through their territories, build underground complexes, forage for food and take care of their families. No wonder they want variety... also as pets. By the way, this is no substitute for a companion. The basic requirement for a rabbit's happiness is not to be kept on its own!

To teach your rabbit tricks and stunts you can use treats as a reward in the beginning, after each little step forward. Make sure you use small, not over-rich titbits otherwise the rabbit will quickly become satisfied and stop cooperating. It might even put on weight and become lethargic. Another way of teaching rabbits something is the "clicker" method, better known mainly in dog training circles. The animal is trained to recognise a "click" as gratification. In the beginning, a treat follows after the click then later the click alone suffices as reward.

Under no circumstances should you overtax your rabbit or alarm it. Practice in small steps and, to start with, only for brief periods as initially the animals can't concentrate for much longer than a minute. Even if an animal reacts shyly don't give up right away. As soon as it experiences

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little successes, its self confidence will increase. Give it time, handle your furry friend calmly and patiently and always bear in mind that it's not about performance - it's about fun and more quality time.

FAVOURITE STUNTS

The following practice routines are well suited to rabbits as they correspond to the animals' typical movement patterns and are relatively easy to learn.

Jumping: rabbits are good jumpers and some of them can even jump really high. Despite this you should be content with low hurdles to begin with then raise them slowly. Don't let bunny dodge the issue (e.g. by hopping around or underneath it) and coax it with a titbit on the end of a wooden stick, for instance.

Standing up straight: rabbits also stand up straight in the wild to get a better all round view. Challenge them by holding out a treat somewhat higher up. If you combine it consistently with a verbal challenge (e.g. "Up!"), you can even teach them to stand up on command.

Clambering onto a platform: some rabbits can clamber up cushions, cartons or their own cages quite unassisted when they're running around outside. If you want your furry friend to do it spontaneously, the basic requirements have to be in place: the platform must be big enough, stable and non-slippery otherwise there is the danger it might collapse. A rigid carton suits best or a pot, perhaps with a piece of carpet glued to it for a better grip. Using the titbit, first entice the animal to the platform... then onto it - and reward it as soon as it's sitting up there.



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