

BUNNY BONDING GUIDE



RABBIT ADVOCATES

Portland, Oregon
rabbitadvocates.org



Bond, Bunny, Bond!

It's not as simple as it sounds... Although most bunnies like having another bunny friend, forcing two bunnies to get along can result in injuries and trips to the emergency vet.

Rabbit Advocates has many bonded pairs available for adoption, or can help you find a bond-mate for a bunny in search of a friend.



GETTING READY

- **As social animals, most bunnies enjoy having a bunny friend, as long as they like the other bun.** Getting a second bunny without going through a dating/bonding process is risky because many bunnies do not get along and may never get along. Some bunnies may not want/need a friend now, but might get lonely when their humans are no longer home as often.
- **All bunnies must be fixed for at least 3-4 weeks before going on dates.** Hormone levels take a while to drop. Male bunnies can still be fertile until 6 weeks after they are neutered.
- **All bunnies should be vaccinated against RHDV2 at least 2 weeks prior to going on dates** in any areas affected by this deadly virus.
- **Make sure you have enough space for two bunnies.** The larger the bunnies' cohabitation space, the better. Sometimes even tightly bonded couples need their space. Our minimum size requirement for a pair of small bonded buns is access to a "footprint" of 20-25 square feet (on one level, not divided across 3 smaller levels) at all times. The bigger the bunnies, the bigger the space they require.



- **Submit an adoption application and embrace the process.** Courting can be a bit of a roller coaster at times. This is normal. Love at first sight is rare. Prepare to keep both bunnies separate for up to 6-8 weeks before they are bonded.
- **Forcing two bunnies to get along can result in injuries and trips to the emergency vet.** “Stress bonding” is also not recommended because it’s scary for bunnies. Rabbits are prey animals who need safety and stability.
- **It's best to adopt a prospective bond-mate through a dedicated rabbit rescue like Rabbit Advocates** as we offer advice and support to approved adoption applicants through the entire process. Unless you can manage two separate bunnies who do not get along and you can take great care of both bunnies indoors, it is risky to add a second bunny who may not ever get along with the first. Most shelters cannot offer “bonding trial runs” and cannot take bunnies back if it doesn’t work out.
- **Every bunny relationship has its own unique dynamics,** just like human couples.

GETTING READY

FINDING A DATE

- **After spay/neuter, male-female pairings usually work best.** Male-male and female-female pairings increase the likelihood of dangerous aggression, even if both are fixed. Most long-term male-male and female-female bonded pairs are either sibling or parent-child bonds that have lasted beyond the spay/neuter.
- **Many bunnies who got along as babies grow apart** with age and hormonal changes, which is one of many reasons to adopt a fixed bonded pair from a rescue instead of buying two bunnies as babies and hoping they'll get along.
- **Comparable age is a good idea** due to lifespan and hormones, but we've seen 6-year-old and 6-month-old buns fall in love.
- **Size doesn't matter.** Tiny bunnies and giant bunnies can easily fall in love. But be extra careful during the dating process if there is a significant size difference to avoid potential injury.



FINDING A DATE

- **Make a “shortlist” with your favorite eligible single buns.** Obviously it’s important that your bunny likes the new bunny, but it’s important for the humans to also be really excited about adding a new bun to the family.
- **Female bunnies tend to be the "boss"** in male-female pairings, and prepare for both bunnies to mount one another.
- **Forming trios is extremely challenging and not recommended.** We would all love to have a group of 3-4 bonded bunnies, but it rarely happens.
- **Consider adopting an already-bonded pair if you do not already have a bunny.** Rabbit Advocates always has fixed bonded pairs, including sibling and parent-child pairs, available for adoption.





SETTING UP THE DATE

- **The date should occur in a neutral space** so neither bunny will feel like another is intruding on his/her home turf.
- **Set up an exercise pen with a fresh litter box.** Bunnies may not want to share their own litter box with another bunny they barely know.
- **One person sits in the exercise pen with both bunnies to act as a chaperone.** Be prepared to intervene in case aggression occurs. Be careful about using your body/hands, as you may get nipped. (Of course, hopefully there is no fighting or nipping, but it's good to be prepared.)
- **Tips to keep the humans safe:** Sometimes it helps for the human chaperone to wear oven mitts. Other ideas include having someone outside the date space to be ready with a towel, soft broom, or dustpan. If the bunnies fight, sliding an object between them or clapping can help to separate the bunnies, and give the chaperone an opportunity to scoop up one of the bunnies and end the date.
- **A Rabbit Advocates team member may be able to watch dates** over video chat to help interpret the bunny body language. Check in with your Adoption Counselor if you'd like help.



- **Allow the bunnies to hop around the pen and explore a bit.** They may pretend to ignore each other, but they are keenly aware of the other's presence.
- **Mounting/humping from behind is how bunnies work out their dominance,** and can usually be allowed for up to 10-15 seconds for 2-3 times in one date before separating the buns. If the bun on the bottom is extremely distressed or hurt, stop the mounting sooner. If one bun mounts the other's face, stop the mounting immediately. Usually mounting settles down, as does mild chasing and fur pulling, within a couple of months.
- **Jumpstart the "bunny magic":** bring both bunnies close together and pet them at the same time so they associate the presence of the other bunny as calming and desirable.

ON THE DATE

ON THE DATE

- **Grooming may not happen on the first date**, or for weeks, and may be one-sided. Male bunnies usually need to groom the female bunny first prior to being groomed by her.
- **Watch out for "bunny tornadoes"** in which the buns chase each other in a tight circle, leaping over/around the other bunny. Frenzied chasing and excessive mounting can quickly devolve into dangerous situations. If bunnies get into a giant fight, they may hold a grudge and refuse to ever bond.
- **Monitor the length of time on each date** that the two buns can stay in the same area before they start getting hormonal/territorial and have to be split up.
- **Don't get discouraged by a bad date** or a date that has to be quickly cut off. Sometimes other factors might be at play like sirens outside or the smell of an unfamiliar cat on their chaperone's clothes.
- **End all dates on a positive note**, even if the buns had to be separated due to mounting or aggression. A small treat, fresh greens, or new chew sticks are a nice reward.



ENDING THE DATE

Remember: Very very rarely do bunnies hit it off right away. The first date is just the beginning and a helpful indicator of whether the bunnies might be amenable to becoming buddies down the line. A first date usually goes one of three ways:



The bunnies dislike one another and try to fight -- if this happens, bonding will likely be an uphill battle.



The bunnies are neutral, not aggressive, and maybe even act "bored" -- this is something you can work with!



The bunnies express interest in one another, lay down next to each other, put their heads together or perhaps one bunny even grooms the other. Grooming on a first date is a positive sign and definitely something you can work with.





BONDING TRIAL RUNS

*Up to 2 weeks with
Rabbit Advocates*

- **New bunny couples usually need to be supervised together at all times for the first 6 weeks.** Within 2 weeks of having the second bunny at the home of the first bunny, it's usually possible to tell whether the bond is headed in the right direction or not. Applicants can decide whether to adopt the bunny or end the bonding trial run.
- **We can't emphasize this enough, but please NEVER leave "dating" buns together unsupervised for up to the first 6 weeks into the bonding trial or until they can stay together for 12+ hours with supervision without incident.**
- **Try to keep the second bunny in an area that the first bunny doesn't consider his/her own territory for the first week.** This reduces the instantaneous territorial responses that can sink a new bunny relationship.
- **Larger cohabitation spaces and new items tend to reduce territorial behaviors.** Bunnies can be very protective of "their" litter box, hidey house, or favorite blanket early in the bunny relationship.



- **Bunny proofing needs may change with a new bunny and/or new bunny couple.** Keep an eye out for how the new bun and pair are adapting to their new home and life together. Some bunnies require a higher-level of bunny-proofing than others. Also, bunny couples may enjoy working together as a team on "special projects" such as pushing chairs several feet so they can launch themselves over a pet gate. They may enjoy their "adventures", but their human parents may not!
- **New bunny couples can be messy!** Even perfectly litter trained buns often start leaving little poop barriers or spraying pee to impress their new friend. It should settle down within 2-3 months of bonding. Giant litter boxes with room for two buns and multiple litter boxes often help, as does cleaning up thoroughly using white vinegar.
- **Rabbit Advocates will do everything we can to take bunnies back even if the bond falls apart after the 2-week trial.** Adoption fees cannot be refunded, but can be applied toward the adoption of another bond-mate for the same bun within 1 year of the initial adoption.

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BONDED PAIRS

- **Bonded pairs usually cannot be separated.** Once two bunnies are bonded and living together in the same space at all times, separating them risks creating unnecessary stress and potentially breaking their bond. They must both go to the vet even if only one is sick, and they must both go to Grandma's together for the weekend if their parents are away. Otherwise, they will come home smelling different and both bunnies will be upset.
- **If bonded bunnies are forced to be apart, they may have to be re-bonded** by going through all the original steps listed in the bonding process. This can happen if one bunny needs to be hospitalized overnight and the vet is unable to keep both bunnies together.
- **If a bonded bun loses her/his bond-mate, it's important to ensure the health and well-being of the remaining bunny.** Bunnies mourn the loss of a companion and may become depressed, eat less, fatigued, and/or stop moving around. The surviving bunny may also need a vet checkup. If the living bunny is healthy, sometimes coming back to Rabbit Advocates for a new bond-mate or perhaps to foster an opposite sex bun will cheer them up.



**READY TO FIND A FRIEND FOR YOUR
BUNNY OR ADOPT A PAIR?**

**CHECK OUT OUR ADOPTION FAQ
AND FILL OUT AN APPLICATION TO
GET THE PROCESS STARTED NOW!**

rabbitadvocates.org





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