

BEDDING & CLEANING THE HUTCH/ SHED

I am often asked how often should a rabbit house be cleaned out and what is the best way to bed it so I decided to write this fact sheet to help.

I like to paint the inside of my hutches with white emulsion paint because it brightens the hutch, but more importantly it protects the wood and allows urine to be wiped away as it seems to prevent the urine absorbing into the wood better than some wood stains. It's a good idea to varnish the hutch inside and out with weatherproof varnish, but make sure it is pet friendly.

A second idea, especially with sheds is to place lino on the floor, but make sure it is sealed in properly with bathroom sealant because if the rabbits chew and swallow the lino they could develop serious digestive problems and die. This will also protect the wood and make disinfection and prevention of disease very easy.

Once this is done, you can then bed the hutch. It is always cheaper to buy horse-sized bales of wood shavings and go to local farms for bales of hay and straw. Make sure you don't use sawdust or shavings from carpenters, which could have chemicals in them and be dusty.

I like to put a thick layer of wood shavings on the floor, which will absorb urine toxins away from the rabbits skin and keep the hutch more hygienic for longer. Rabbits can also develop sores on their paws if they don't have a soft bed.

I then sprinkle a thick layer of straw in the bedroom compartment as it is a good insulator and whether winter or summer, a nice bed of straw prevents boredom and allows them to gnaw and nest make. It also drains urine/ moisture away, where as hay absorbs it.

Hay is the most essential part of a rabbits diet, and as most rabbits are shut away from grass at night for long hours, grass during the day alone isn't enough. I also wouldn't be without Timothy hay and dried grass, where I know of three brands. These ingredients I fill the front of the hutch with so I can see the rabbit grazing as I walk by and can observe when they need replenishing.

Rabbits naturally toilet in corners or one place, so I also place a large litter tray in the area of the hutch they use most. I place this on top of the wood shavings, put a newspaper in it, with a handful of wood shavings and then the hay or straw on top, depending where the hutch is.

If your rabbits live in a shed, which is the modern recommended idea, you can both place newspapers on top of the lino and then place a nest box or small hutch in the shed with plenty of straw for warmth, with litter trays in the corners. I tend to place the hays in the trays as they like to graze while they toilet. Alternatively treat the shed as a large hutch/ small stable!

When to clean

The rule I use is; if it's not clean enough for me to lie in, it's not clean enough for my rabbits! It's good to check daily, and clean the dirty areas daily and add fresh hay. You may only need to do a thorough clean once or twice a week. By placing a small entrance hole in the shed or hutch and keeping a tarpaulin or wooden sheet over the hutch front and main doors closed, the inside will not get wet from snow and rain, which during winter will cause the need for daily cleaning.

You'll need a hard and soft brush, dustpan and I find a knife, chisel and paint scraper helpful to clean the corners and dried on droppings. Various disinfectants are available, but some only kill mites and not viruses. Some can be sprayed on the bedding, while others need wiping off and drying thoroughly before the rabbits return.