

Instructions for Tattooing Rabbits

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Tattooing is the only accepted and appropriate method to identify rabbits used for breeding and showing in the United States. A legible tattoo in a rabbit's ear provides permanent identification for that animal. For rabbits to be shown at American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) shows, the personal tattoo must be put in the rabbit's left ear. The right ear is reserved for a registration tattoo placed there by an ARBA registrar.

Tattooing rabbits is necessary for the identification of rabbits shown at county fairs and at state fair. Youth showing breeding rabbits should make sure the tattoo for county and state fair identification is put in the rabbit's left ear, keeping the right ear reserved for the ARBA tattoo should the exhibitor decide to register the rabbit.

When a rabbit's ear is tattooed, a plier-style tattoo instrument is used to pierce the skin of the ear with the needles of the tattoo digits. ("Digits" in this case refers to numbers or letters.) The tattoo device is squeezed together with the ear between the digits and the rubber backing pad of the tool. The digits must completely penetrate the ear. Ink is then rubbed into the puncture holes. The ink becomes permanently fixed in the area within the tissue of the skin as the puncture marks heal, making the tattoo legible and permanent. Several brands of pen-type tattoo instruments can be used, but they require more time than the plier-style tattoo options.

Items Needed

- Tattoo pliers (Tattoo pens may be used but are more time consuming than pliers.)
- Digits (numbers, letters, or both)

- Ink (Do not use paste. Thin art-type ink is the best option because it is easier to rub into the puncture holes.)
- Isopropyl alcohol
- Paper towels
- Cotton swabs
- Petroleum jelly
- No. 2 pencils, if desired
- Disposable gloves
- Carpeted table or carpet squares for secure footing

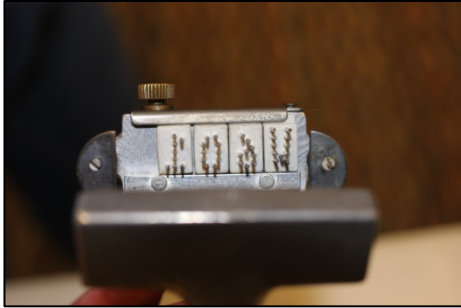
Preparation of Tattooing Area

1. Locate a quiet area with sufficient room and bright lighting.
2. Use a table covered with carpet or secured carpet squares so the rabbit feels safe and does not slip.
3. The table should be a height comfortable to the person tattooing and the person holding the rabbit. Grooming tables can make good tattoo tables.
4. Have an area on the table or next to the table for the tattoo items where they will not get knocked over and the ink will not spill.

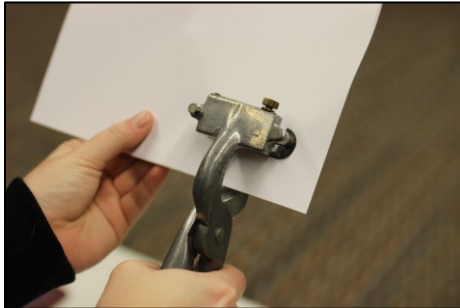
Tattooing Procedure

1. Before beginning, disinfect the pliers and tattoo digits by dipping them in isopropyl alcohol.
2. Select the tattoo digits for the first rabbit.
3. Put the digits correctly in the pliers before tattooing. Test the intended tattoo by using a piece of paper or paper towel to make sure you have the correct digits and that they are properly aligned.





Digits inserted into tattoo pliers



Testing the arrangement of the digits



The digits in order on paper

4. Place the rabbit in the proper tattooing position. A very effective method is for one person to hold the head and rump, with the person tattooing positioned across the table.



5. Put on disposable gloves prior to handling the ink (if desired), as it can temporarily stain hands.
6. Examine the location where the tattoo will be placed in the rabbit's left ear, which is the ear as you look down over the animal from behind. The tattoo should be placed above the main visible vein in the ear.
Note: Rabbits with very hot ears may bleed excessively. If the ear is very hot, dip a towel in cold water, squeeze the excess water from the towel, and place the cold towel on the ears until the ear is cool.



7. If ears are dirty, thoroughly clean and dry the ear before applying the tattoo.
8. Both the holder and person tattooing should be prepared for the rabbit to attempt to jump and move once tattoo digits pierce the ear.
9. Place the pliers in the correct position in the ear. The tattoo should be placed in the ear so it is legible when observing the ear from the rabbit's left side. Place the tattoo so the first digit is lowest on the ear. For example, the ID for the rabbit above is RS53, with the R appearing at the base of the ear. Make sure the side of the tattoo pliers with the digits is *inside* the ear. When applying the tattoo, make sure the ear is straight, with no folds. Tattoo pliers that have the spring-loaded release are preferred because they remove the ear

from the tattooing digits once pliers are released.

10. Once the tattoo pliers are properly positioned, firmly squeeze the pliers together for 1-2 seconds to ensure needles penetrate through the inner skin of the rabbit's left ear. The pliers must be completely closed for the tattoo to be readable.
11. In young rabbits, it is common for the digits to penetrate completely through the ear. This is okay, as the backside of the ear will heal over and not leave marks on the outside of the ear. It is better to completely penetrate the ear than to apply too little pressure and end up with a tattoo that no one can read.
12. Next vigorously rub the ink into the puncture holes. Use a cotton swab, pencil eraser, or finger to work the ink into the puncture holes.
13. Do not remove excess ink.
14. Apply a light film of petroleum jelly over the tattoo. Petroleum jelly will temporarily seal the holes while the puncture holes absorb the ink as they heal.
15. Dip the tattoo pliers and used digits in isopropyl alcohol to disinfect before inserting digits for the next rabbit. Use paper towels to clean excess ink and petroleum jelly from your hand or glove.

When Taking the Rabbit Home

Do not clean off any excess ink until the ink is completely absorbed in the rabbit's ear. Rabbits are good at cleaning the excess ink out of their own ears typically within a week of being tattooed.

Sources

Rabbit Resource Handbook, 4-H 228R, Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, Ohio, 2004

Tattooing Rabbits: How to Tattoo Your Rabbit, University of Florida.

florida4h.org/projects/rabbits

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