

4-H Rabbit Show Preparation and Showmanship Fact Sheet

Introduction

Select one or more purebred rabbits for your 4-H project that are of a breed recognized by the American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA). This allows you to show your rabbits at ARBA sanctioned shows, as well as the county and/or state fair. Attend sanctioned rabbit shows and talk with breeders to determine the best breed for you. Rabbits selected should be as close to meeting the ARBA standard for that breed as possible.

As soon as you get your rabbits, begin preparing for the show. Proper handling is a must for your safety as well as the safety and welfare of the rabbits.

Below is an outline to help 4-H members properly handle their rabbits, as well as prepare for the show and showmanship.

Handling

1. Wear long sleeves to protect your arms from getting scratched.
2. Handle your rabbit with care, and often.
3. Always handle your rabbit humanely. NEVER lift or carry a rabbit by its ears. This is painful for the rabbit. Lifting by the ears causes damage to the ear veins. Also, without the entire body being supported, when a rabbit kicks to free itself, it may cause bone fractures in its back or hind legs, and cause injury to nerves or tendons.
4. NEVER lift a rabbit by its legs. This is painful, as well as can cause injury as mentioned in No. 3.
5. NEVER lift a rabbit by the scruff of its neck without supporting the entire body weight, as injuries can occur as mentioned in No. 3. Also, fur can be damaged.
6. Put a rug or piece of carpet on the table or area where you are handling your rabbit, so it can get a foothold when being handled. Smooth surfaces cause a rabbit to slide, making it hard to handle, groom, and pose. A rabbit will not feel secure on smooth places, and may become afraid.
7. Handle your rabbit during the cool part of the day. Two or three short sessions are better than one long session.
8. Handling rabbits when it is too hot can cause unnecessary stress and heat stroke.
9. Carry your rabbit by tucking its head under your arm while supporting its body between your side and your same arm. The rabbit's eyes should be covered by your elbow. Support the hindquarters with your free hand.
10. Refer to the Ohio 4-H *Rabbit Resource Handbook*, 228R, pages 54-55 for proper handling techniques. Also, you may refer to the following URL to watch the video, "Handling Rabbits," by Travis West, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development Vinton County: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lasl23z_Ok.



Show Preparation

Show preparation begins with proper care and handling as soon as you select your 4-H rabbits. Rabbits need to be in good condition, which, as defined in the ARBA Standard, refers to their health, cleanliness, fur, and grooming. Hutches and cages need to be kept clean. Rabbits need fresh water daily, as well as a balanced diet for their age and purpose. Keep rabbits out of direct sunlight to prevent their fur from fading. Monitor your rabbit daily and note any changes in its behavior or condition.

Grooming

1. Begin grooming your rabbit at least six weeks before the show.
2. Groom in the cool part of the day.
3. Use a table covered with a rug or piece of carpet as a grooming stand. Make sure the table is sturdy and does not wobble while grooming your rabbit.
4. For the first few days of grooming, moisten your hands and rub them through the rabbit's fur (from head to tail) until it is damp.
5. Once the fur is damp, stroke the rabbit from head to tail several times to remove dead fur.
6. Do not rub the fur backwards (from tail to head) as that can break the guard hairs.
7. Repeat steps 4 through 6 for several days.
8. Then continue to groom your rabbit daily by stroking the fur from head to tail without dampening the fur. This makes the fur shiny and tight.
9. Daily grooming improves the appearance of your rabbit, and tames it, making it easier to handle.

Posing Your Rabbit

1. While grooming, put your rabbit in the proper show position for its breed, and teach it to stay in that position.
2. If you do not know the show position for your breed, put it in the most common pose as follows:
 - a. Place it on the table. Face the rabbit to your right if you are left-handed or to your left if you are right-handed. (This makes it easier to pick the rabbit up.)
 - b. Place the tip of the front feet so they are even with the rabbit's eyes.
 - c. Place the tip of the hind feet even with the rabbit's hip bones.
 - d. Make sure the rabbit's tail is showing and not tucked under its body.

Showmanship

Rabbit showmanship is a combination of a 4-H member's knowledge of good rabbit management and care, and how that information is presented to a judge; the ability to handle and show the rabbit according to the American Rabbit Breeders Association breed standard; cleanliness and condition of the rabbit; the 4-H member's knowledge of his or her rabbit's good qualities, as well as its faults or disqualifications according to its breed standard. In addition, the 4-H member's appearance, show ring ethics, and sportsmanship are a part of showmanship.

During a showmanship class, the 4-H member should wear a long sleeve shirt or show coat, such as a white lab coat. Long pants or skirt, and shoes with closed toes and heels should be worn. Jewelry that dangles and gets in the way should not be worn.

Long hair should be tied back in such a way that it does not interfere with presentation of the rabbit.

4-H'ers will be asked age-appropriate questions related to subject matter such as proper care, health, nutrition, production, and their rabbit's breed, variety, class and fur descriptions according to the ARBA *Standard of Perfection*. Youth will also be expected to properly handle their rabbits and examine them for faults and disqualifications according to the ARBA *Standard of Perfection*.

Once your rabbit is used to being handled, begin practicing showmanship. Work with your rabbit every day or every other day. Get your rabbit used to being around other people, strange noises, and other rabbits. The steps below explain how to examine a rabbit for faults, disqualifications and general conformation. Refer to the Ohio 4-H *Rabbit Resource Handbook*, 228R, Chapter 10, Show Preparation for further information.

Examination

1. Carry rabbit to judging table or removing rabbit from cage.
2. Properly pose your rabbit.
3. Examine your rabbit in the following order. Tell the judge what you are looking for.
 - a. *Ears – Check for:*
Ear canker; Illegible or missing tattoo;
Size and carriage of ears; Torn or missing part of ear
 - b. *Eyes – Check for:*
Wall eye (white cornea); Spots on eyes; Mismatched eye color;
Runny or weepy eyes
 - c. *Nose – Check for:*
Colds (white nasal discharge)
 - d. *Teeth – Check for:*
Malocclusion (buck or wolf teeth); Simple malocclusion (biting teeth);
Broken or missing tooth
 - e. *Chin/Neck Area – Check for:*
Dewlap (does); Abscesses
 - f. *Front Legs – Check for:*
Bent, bowed or deformed
 - g. *Front Feet and Toenails – Check for:*
Missing toenails (5 on each front foot), including dewclaw; Broken
toenails (too short to determine color);
Unmatched toenails; Nail color not meeting breed standard
 - h. *Abdomen – Check for:*
Mastitis or swollen teats; Tumor, rupture or hernia;
Abscesses
 - i. *Hind Legs – Check for:*
Bent, bowed, deformed, or severely cow hocked
 - j. *Hocks – Check for:*
Sore hocks (bloody)
 - k. *Hind Feet and Toenails – Check for:*
Missing toenails (4 on each hind foot); Broken toenails (too short to
determine color); Unmatched toenails
Nail color not meeting breed standard
 - l. *Sex – Check for:*
Vent disease; Missing testicle(s) on Senior Buck; Junior Buck with only
one testicle showing; split penis
 - m. *Tail – Check for:*
Stub, broken or wry tail

References:

Miller, L.B., Dick, J., Weigly, B., Conrad, J., Mangione, D., Maruschak, D., & Dill, D. (2004). *Rabbit Resource Handbook*. Columbus: The Ohio State University, Ohio State University Extension.

American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc. (2011). American Rabbit Breeders Association *Standard of Perfection 2011-2015*. Illinois: Bloomington.