

Housing plans for a backyard rabbitry

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no. 1.207

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Quick Facts

- The physical structure for housing rabbits should be built with both the animals and the caretakers in mind.
- Animals must be protected from extremes of heat and cold, drafts, dust and moisture.
- Caretakers must have quick and easy access for feeding, watering, cleaning and handling of animals.
- A three-cage hutch is designed to hold three rabbits in separate compartments, or two rabbits of the same sex may be reared in one cage until they are six months old.
- As much wood surface as possible should be covered with welded wire to prevent wood chewing by rabbits.
- All-metal feeders—either commercial or hand-made—are recommended for use in rabbit cages; aluminum dishes are satisfactory for waterers.

No matter what ambitions a person may have in the business of raising rabbits, he or she would be wise to start small and expand slowly as markets become available for the products. The hutch detailed here will offer good housing and protection for rabbits with a relatively small initial investment.

Ideally, the physical structure for housing rabbits should be built with both the animals and the caretakers in mind. The animals must be protected from extremes of heat and cold, drafts, dust and moisture. They need ventilation and sufficient space to have some freedom of movement and, in the case of breeding does, space for placement of nest boxes and rearing of young. The caretakers must have quick and easy access for feeding, watering, cleaning and handling of animals.

This hutch is designed to house three rabbits in separate cages, each 29" x 31" (71 x 79 centimeters), see Figure 1. The cages are large enough for does and their litters, and the plans may be modified as the rabbits expand. For smaller breeds, and for developing meat-type breeding stock, a hutch with four holes or cage compartments, each 23 1/4" x 29" (59 x 74 cm), works very well (see Figure 2). Two animals of the same sex may be reared per cage during development up to six months of age.

Materials for construction of a backyard rabbit facility are listed in detail below with a total approximate cost of \$65 (Fort Collins, Colo., April 1977).

The 1" x 1/2" (2.5 x 1.3 cm) welded wire mesh (14 gauge) is recommended for the floor of the cages, as this wire seems to provide the best support for the rabbits resulting in the least incidence of sore hocks. This wire type may, however, be difficult to obtain in some localities and 1/2" x 1/2" (1.3 x 1.3 cm) hardware cloth may be substituted. If 1/2" x 1/2" (1.3 x 1.3 cm) wire is used as the floor, the hutch floor should be provided with additional supports—one in the middle of each cage.

- 1) The floor should be constructed first as a complete unit, using staples to secure the wire. If 1/2" x 1/2" (1.3 x 1.3 cm)

Table 1: Materials for a backyard rabbit facility.

	Quantity*	Dimensions and type*
Lumber**	1	8' x 1" x 6"
	2	4' x 8' x 1/2" plywood-exterior
	4	10' x 2" x 4"
	4	10' x 2" x 2"
	8	8' x 2" x 4"
Wire	8 feet	1" x 1/2" x 30" welded wire for floor or 1/2" x 1/2" hardware cloth for floor x 36" wide
	10 feet	1/2" x 1/2" hardware cloth for doors and partitions
Roofing	1 roll	White rolled preferred to reflect heat. This material also may be used on sides and back.
Hinges	6	2" strap
Door latches	3	Spring-loaded hook and eye closures
Nails	1 pound	#16 box
	1 pound	Poultry staples
	1/2 pound	#8 box
	1/2 pound	Roofing tacks
Paint	1 gallon	Exterior—white preferred to reflect heat.

*To convert to metrics, use the following equivalents; 1 foot = 30.5 centimeters; 1 pound = .45 kilogram; 1 gallon = 3.8 liters; 1 inch = 2.5 centimeters.

**Construction grade rather than high quality lumber is most economical and generally is adequate.

wire is used, it should be left a full 36" (91 cm) wide and the excess folded onto the sides for more support. If the wire is placed on the bottom as the legs, sides, back and roof are assembled around the floor section, the cages will be easier to keep clean than if the wire floor is on top.

- 2) The front and back legs should be cut from the 10' x 2" x 4" (3 meter x 5 cm x 10 cm) lumber, obtaining one front and one back leg from each 10' (3 m) of length. Each should be notched according to where the roof beams will connect (Figure 4), then the floor wire cut and the back legs inserted. Front legs are nailed directly onto the front of the floor (Figure 4). The legs then are secured by the horizontal supports nailed 15" (38 cm) below the floor (Figure 5).
- 3) Two of the 8' x 2" x 4" pieces (2.4 m x 5 cm x 10 cm) pieces should be cut in half for the roof beams, then the front ends can be angled (Figure 5) to prevent a bruised head later. Beams then should be placed in the notches that have been cut in each of the legs and nailed into place.
- 4) A measurement should be made from front leg to back and from floor wire to roof and wire cut to this specification for cage partitions. As much wood surface as possible should be covered to prevent wood chewing by the rabbits.

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- 5) One complete sheet of plywood is used for the roof and the other plywood sheet cut for the back and sides (as indicated in Figure 6). The back piece should be notched to hold the overhanging roof beams. The 8' x 1" x 6" (2.4 m x 2.5 cm x 15 cm) is also notched and nailed to the front legs under the roof (Figure 7).
- 6) The doors are measured according to the actual hutch construction before the 2" x 2" (5 x 5 cm) lumber is cut, in case of small diversions from the original plans. The middle door will be an inch (2.5 cm) wider than the outside doors (Figure 8). The doors may be painted easily at this point before attaching the wire. Hinges may be placed according to preference. In addition to the hook and eye location on the lower one-third of the door for closing, turn buttons made of scrap lumber are convenient and should be considered as a part of the total construction effort.
- 7) All surfaces not to be covered with roofing material should be painted. The roofing material is then tacked with roofing nails onto remaining surfaces—the roof, back and ends of the hutch.

Hutch Placement

Rabbits rarely are affected adversely by cold temperatures if protected from drafts and moisture, so hutches should be placed with prevailing winds at the rear. To reduce drafts, $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3-millimeter) tempered masonite panels may be attached around the bottom of the hutch. Temperatures above 85°F (29°C), however, can cause severe rabbit problems, so, wherever possible, hutches should be located under shade trees. Where roaming children or predators are a problem, one-inch (2.5-cm) poultry netting may be attached around the legs of the hutch.

Commercial all-metal feeders may be attached through the wire on the doors or handmade feeders may be used. Wooden feed containers are not recommended because they are easily chewed. Feeders made from cans should have screen bottoms so that fines can sift out. Accumulation of feed dust may cause respiratory ailments and unhealthy rabbits. (For more information on rabbit ailments, see Service in Action sheet 1.206.)

Aluminum dishes are satisfactory for waterers. Crocks will freeze and break during winter.

Detailed information about nesting boxes is available from the CSU Cooperative Extension Service in 4-H Members Manual M12200B. More information on management of a backyard rabbitry is available in Service in Action sheets 1.203, 1.204 and 1.205.

Reference

Enos, Howard L., *Colorado 4-H Rabbit Project*, M12200B, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Service, Fort Collins, Colo., 1973, 32 pages.

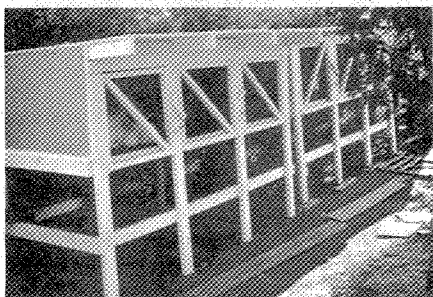


Figure 1: A three-cage hutch designed to hold one or two rabbits in each cage.

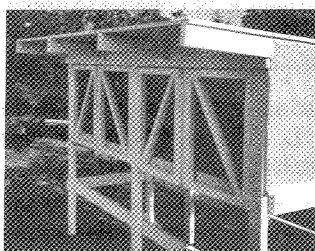


Figure 2: A four-cage hutch designed for smaller breed rabbits or for developing meat-type breeding stock.

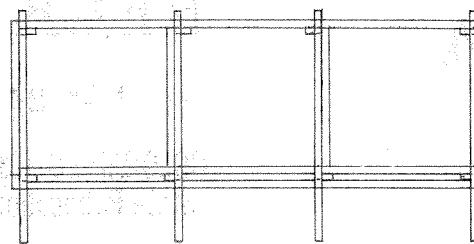


Figure 3: Overhead view of hutch showing entire frame.

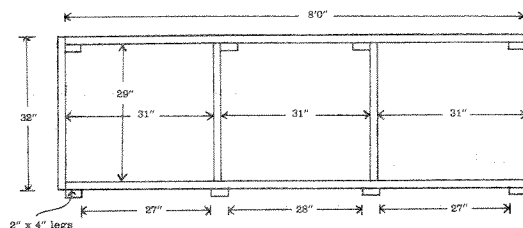


Figure 4: Overhead view of hutch showing floor and legs.

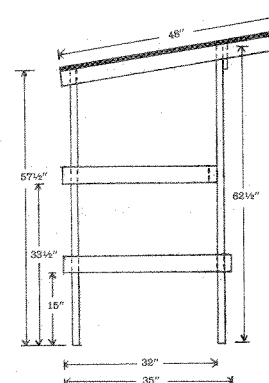


Figure 5: Side view of hutch.

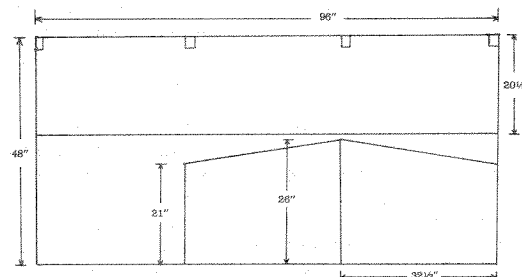


Figure 6: Plywood cutting layout showing dimensions for back and sides of hutch.

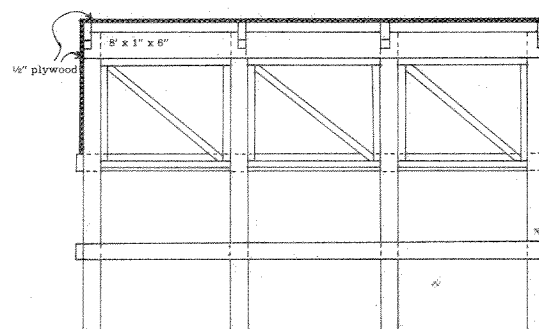


Figure 7: Front view of hutch showing entire construction.

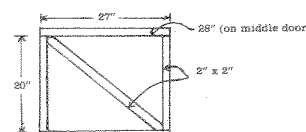


Figure 8: Door frame construction detail.