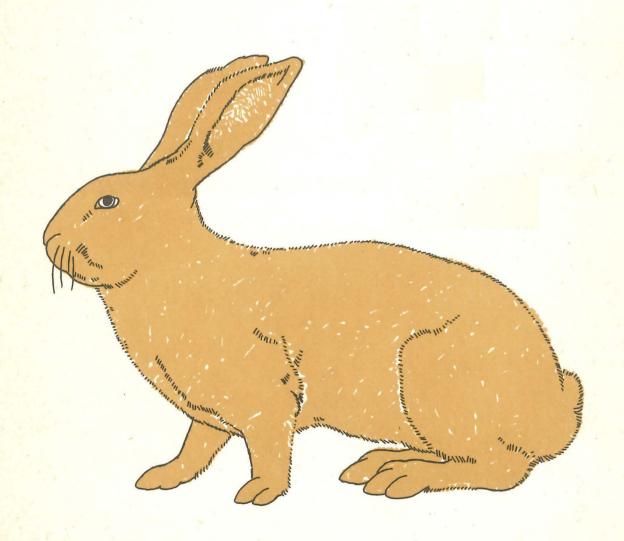
raising rabbits 1

learning about rabbits building the pens choosing rabbits



BETTER FARMING SERIES

The titles published in this series are designed as handbooks for an intermediate-level agricultural education and training course. They may be purchased as a set or individually.

- 1. The plant: the living plant; the root
- 2. The plant: the stem; the buds; the leaves
- 3. The plant: the flower
- 4. The soil: how the soil is made up
- 5. The soil: how to conserve the soil
- 6. The soil: how to improve the soil
- 7. Crop farming
- 8. Animal husbandry: feeding and care of animals
- 9. Animal husbandry: animal diseases; how animals reproduce
- 10. The farm business survey
- 11. Cattle breeding
- 12. Sheep and goat breeding
- 13. Keeping chickens
- 14. Farming with animal power
- 15. Cereals
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- 17. Groundnuts
- 18. Bananas
- 19. Market gardening
- 20. Upland rice
- 21. Wet paddy or swamp rice
- 22. Cocoa
- 23. Coffee
- 24. The oil palm
- 25. The rubber tree
- 26. The modern farm business
- 27. Freshwater fish farming: how to begin
- 28. Water: where water comes from
- 29. Better freshwater fish farming: the pond
- 30. Better freshwater fish farming: the fish
- 31. Biogas: what it is; how it is made; how to use it
- 32. Biogas 2: building a better biogas unit
- 33. Farming snails 1: learning about snails; building a pen; food and shelter plants
- 34. Farming snails 2: choosing snails; care and harvesting; further improvement
- 35. Better freshwater fish farming: further improvement
- 36. Raising rabbits 1: learning about rabbits; building the pens; choosing rabbits

raising rabbits 1

learning about rabbits building the pens choosing rabbits

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PREFACE

The first 26 titles in FAO's Better Farming Series were based on the Cours d'apprentissage agricole prepared in Côte d'Ivoire by the Institut africain de développement économique et social for use by extension workers. Later titles, beginning with No. 27, have been prepared by FAO for use in agricultural development at the farm and family level. The approach has deliberately been a general one, the intention being to provide prototype outlines to be modified or expanded in each area according to local conditions of agriculture and specific training needs.

Many of the booklets deal with specific crops and techniques, while others are intended to give farmers more general information that can help them to understand **why** they do what they do, so that they will be able to do it better.

Adaptations of the series, or of individual volumes in it, have been published in Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Creole, Hindi, Igala, Indonesian, Kiswahili, Malagasy, SiSwati, Thai and Turkish.

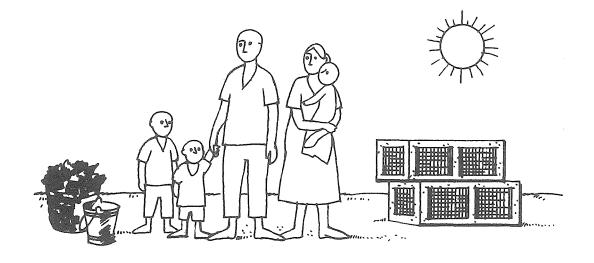
Requests for permission to translate and adapt this manual are welcomed. Such translation work may, in specific cases, be supported by FAO. Requests should be addressed to the Director, Publications Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Via delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy.

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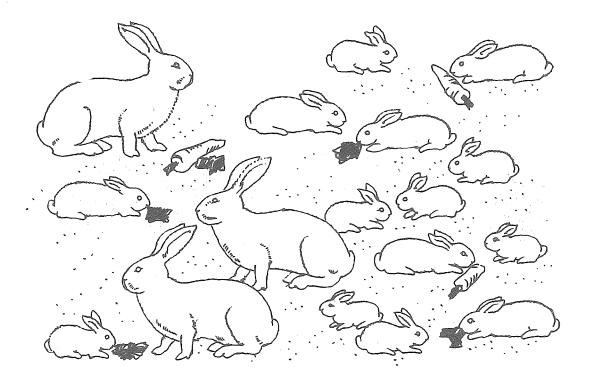
INTRODUCTION

1. A very good way
for you and your family
to improve your lives
is to raise your own rabbits.
If you raise your own rabbits
you will always have fresh meat.



- Rabbit meat is good for you.
 It also tastes good.
 Rabbit meat will help to keep your family strong and healthy.
- Rabbits are easy to raise.
 They are clean, quiet and small.
 You can keep many rabbits
 in a very small place.
- 4. The meat that you will get, even by raising only a few rabbits, will help your family to eat better.
- You can easily find enough food to feed a few rabbits.
 You can even grow some of the food yourself.

- 6. Since one rabbit makes a good meal, and you can eat them one at a time when you need meat, you will not have to worry about rabbit meat going bad.
- 7. Rabbits have babies often. Starting with only a few full-grown rabbits, you can raise many baby rabbits, which will give you a lot of meat.

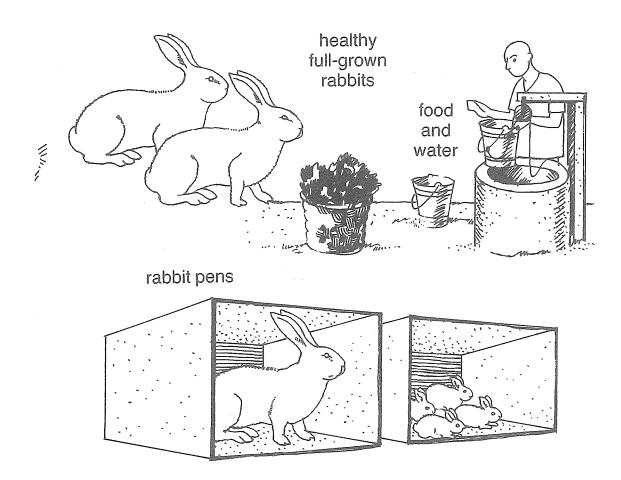


- 8. If you grow more rabbits than you need to eat, you can sell what you do not use to your neighbours or at the market.
- 9. With more food to eat and with the money you get from selling rabbits, you and your family can live better.
- 10. However, if your family is big, you will have to raise more rabbits if you are going to have enough to eat and to sell at the market.

What do you need to raise rabbits?

You will need

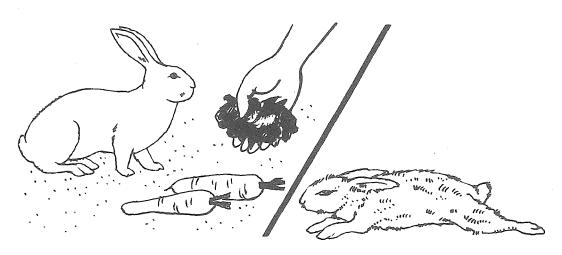
- healthy, full-grown rabbits
- the kinds of food that rabbits eat and plenty of fresh water
- a pen for each full-grown rabbit and pens for the young rabbits
- time to take care of the rabbits



11. Later in this booklet
you will learn
where to get rabbits,
how to grow or find their food,
and how to build their pens
using materials you have at home.

LEARNING ABOUT RABBITS

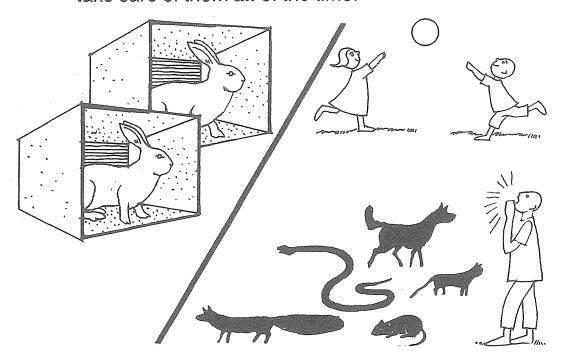
- 12. Rabbits are usually very healthy and hardy animals that grow well if you are careful.
- 13. If you give them a good home and take care of them well they will be less likely to get sick.
- 14. Remember, it is much easier to **keep** rabbits from getting sick than it is to **make** them well after they have become sick.
- 15. Rabbits must have a quiet place to live where they will feel safe and well protected.



A quiet place to live

- 16. Rabbits are very quiet animals and are easily frightened.
 If they become badly frightened, they may become sick or die.
- 17. So, you must give them a home away from people and noise and animals that may frighten or even harm them, such as foxes, rats, snakes, dogs or cats.

18. If you decide to raise rabbits, the same person should take care of them all of the time.

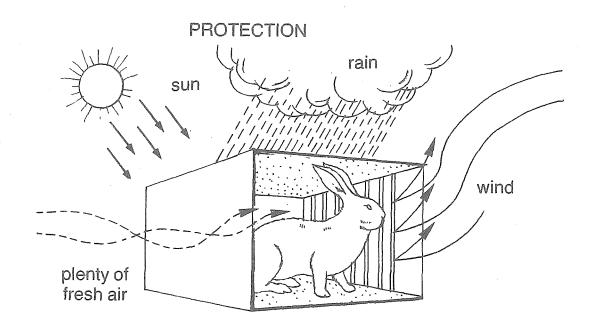


19. That way, the rabbits will become used to their keeper and will not be frightened.

Sun, wind, rain and fresh air

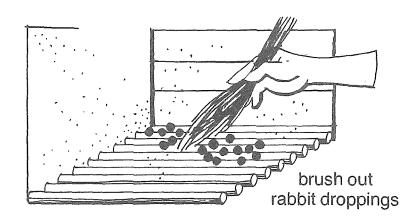
- 20. Rabbits may not grow well if they get too much sunshine.
 They must have a shady place where they can go to get out of the sun.
- 21. Rabbits may become sick or die if it is too windy or if they get wet. Rabbits should **never** be wet. So, they must have a place that is protected from wind and rain.
- 22. However, rabbits **need** fresh air.
 So, if you decide to raise rabbits,
 you must give them a place to live
 that is closed enough to protect them
 from the sun, the wind and the rain,
 and yet open enough
 to allow for plenty of fresh air.

23. Rabbits should have clean, dry homes. You should clean their pens every day, in order to keep them clean and dry.

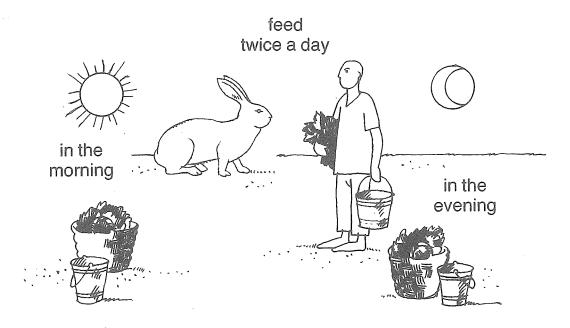


Clean pens, clean food and plenty of clean water

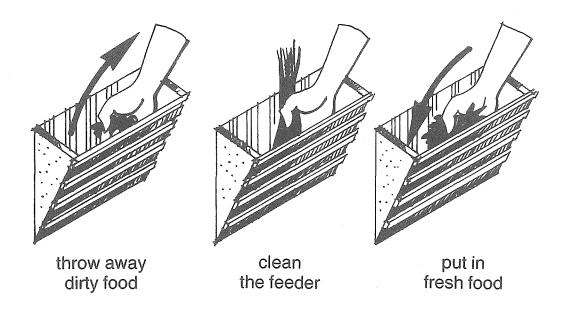
- 24. Rabbit droppings should **never** be allowed to collect on the floor of the pen.
- 25. Rabbits should have clean fresh food and fresh water all of the time.



- 26. Rabbits should be given food twice each day, once early in the morning and once in the evening, after sunset, and water as often as they need it.
- 27. You will have to be especially careful that your rabbits have enough to eat and drink at night, since they eat and drink as much at night as they do during the day.

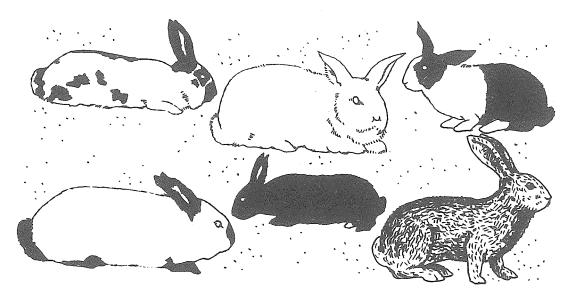


28. If your rabbits' food or water becomes old or dirty throw it away, clean their feeders and water containers and give them fresh food and water.



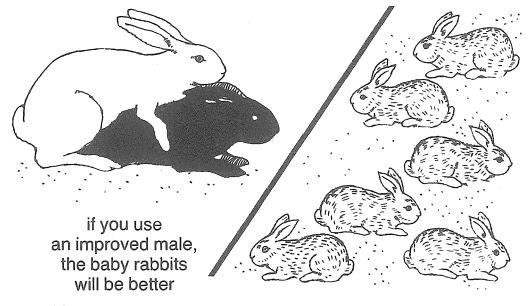
What kinds of rabbits can you raise?

29. There are many kinds of rabbits, all with different sizes, shapes and colours and with different kinds of fur.

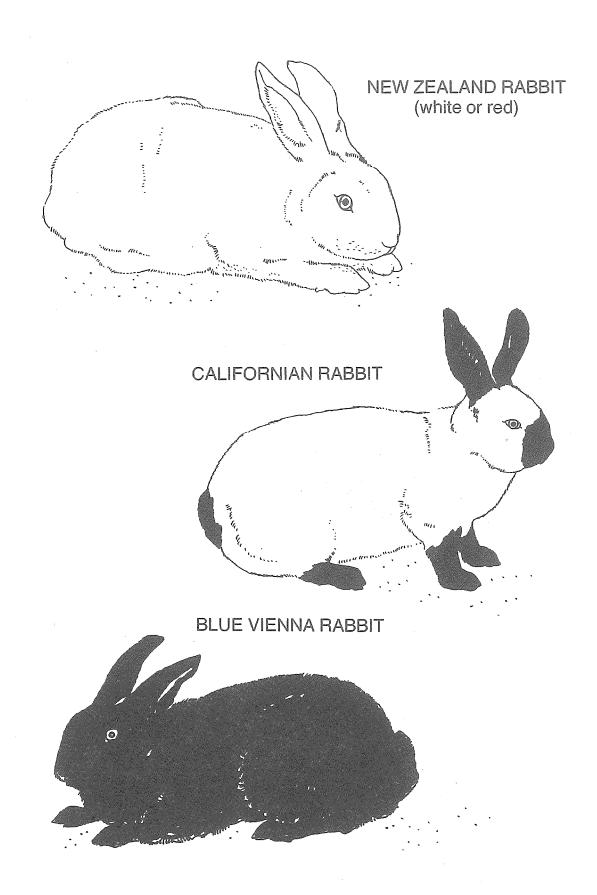


- 30. Some rabbits are small and weigh very little. Other rabbits are large and weigh a lot.
- 31. You must find out the kinds of rabbits that you can get where you live. In most places, you can find several kinds of rabbits.
- 32. Usually, you can get local rabbits.
 Local rabbits are strong and hardy
 and used to living in your area.
 So, they grow well
 and do not get sick easily.
 However, local rabbits are often small
 and give little meat.
- 33. Sometimes, you can get improved rabbits that have been brought from another place. Improved rabbits have been carefully mated over many years and they are better than local rabbits.

- 34. Improved rabbits are larger and give more meat.
 However, they are not as hardy as local rabbits.
 So, if you get improved rabbits you will have to take **better** care of them.
- 35. Sometimes local rabbits are mated with improved rabbits. When the babies are born, they have some of the qualities of both these kinds of rabbits.



- 36. Usually, they are stronger, healthier, live well locally, grow bigger and give more meat than local rabbits.
- 37. However, if you can get them, the very best kind of rabbits for you to raise are medium-sized improved rabbits. These grow more quickly and give the most meat for the amount of food they eat.
- 38. The drawings on the next page show you three kinds of improved, medium-sized rabbits.



39. If you need help,
your extension agent
will be able to give you good advice
on the kinds of rabbits you can get
and where to get them.

What can rabbits eat?

- 40. Rabbits eat almost any kind of plant that is not sour or spoiled.

 Much of the food that they eat is not needed for anything else.
- 41. So, you can raise rabbits, using very little of the food that you need for your family or for your other farm animals.
- 42. Rabbits mostly eat green plant materials such as leaves or stems, or parts of green plants that you do not use.

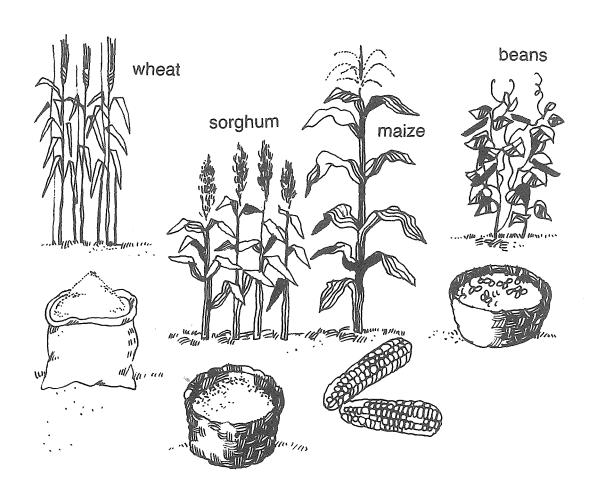
 They also eat many kinds of weeds.



- 43. If you have nothing else, you can feed your rabbits only green plants and weeds.
- 44. However, if you want them to grow very well and fast you will also have to feed them some richer foods.

- 45. In many places, you can buy good, rich foods made especially for rabbits.

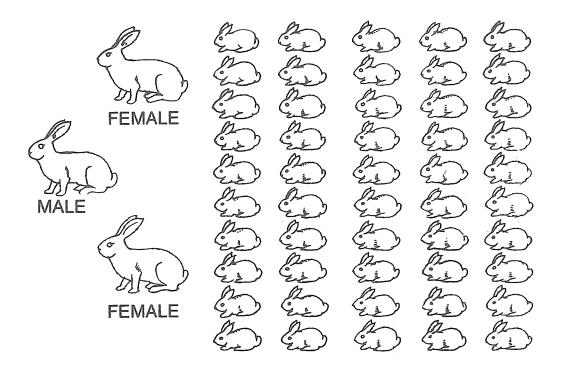
 These are called **rabbit pellets**.
- 46. Some farmers feed only pellets, and their rabbits grow **very** well. However, rabbit pellets cost a lot of money.
- 47. There are many other rich foods that you can give your rabbits, which do not cost so much or which you can grow yourself, such as wheat, barley, beans, maize, sorghum, millet or soybeans.



48. You will learn more about what to feed rabbits and when and how to feed them in the next booklet in this series.

How many rabbits should you raise?

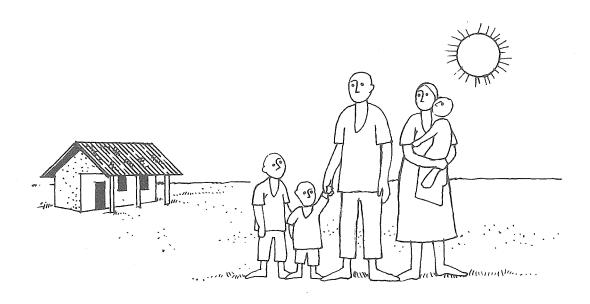
- 49. You can raise many rabbits if you have enough for them to eat, the materials to build enough pens and the time to take care of them.
- 50. However, until you know more about how rabbits live and grow and what you must do to take care of them well, it is best to start with only a few.
- 51. A good number to start with is two full-grown female rabbits and one full-grown male rabbit.
- 52. With two females, you will get as many as 40 to 50 baby rabbits each year.



53. Later, if you find that you could eat or sell more rabbits if you had them, you can begin to raise more.

Now you must decide

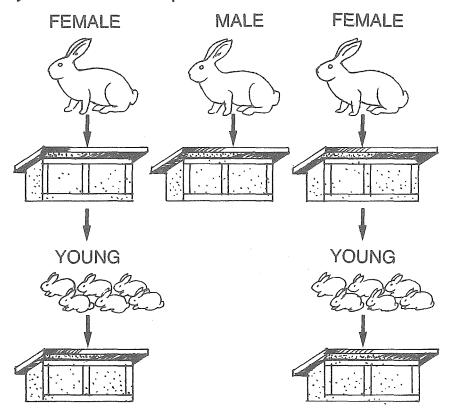
- 54. In the first part of this booklet you have been told a number of things about rabbits and about raising them.
- 55. You learned that by raising rabbits, you will always have fresh meat.
 You also learned that rabbits will grow well if you take care of them well and feed them well.
- 56. You may also have found that you can get healthy full-grown rabbits where you live.
- 57. So, now you must decide if raising rabbits would be good for you and your family.



58. If you decide to raise rabbits, you will learn how to begin in the rest of this booklet and in the next booklet in this series.

HOW TO BEGIN

- 59. The first thing that you will have to do is to build pens for your rabbits.
- 60. To begin you will need one pen for each full-grown rabbit.
 You will also need one pen for the young rabbits of each female.
- 61. If you decide
 to start with two females
 and one male rabbit,
 as you were told to do
 in Item 51 in this booklet,
 you will need five pens.

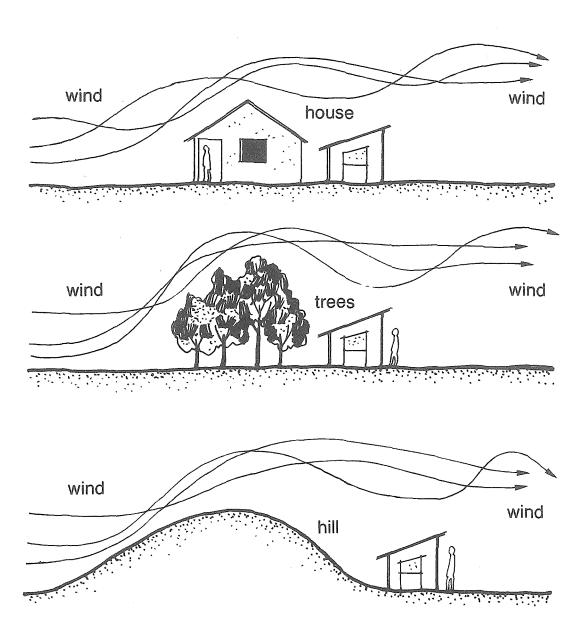


Where can you put your rabbit pens?

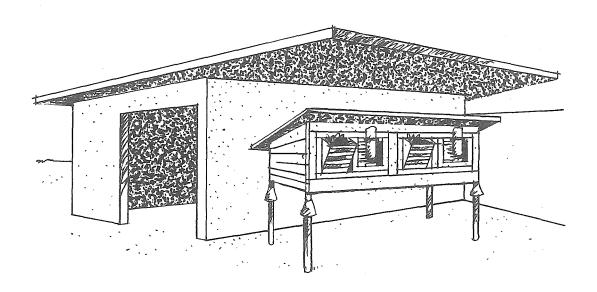
62. The best place for rabbit pens is near your home.

That way you can watch your rabbits, take care of them easily and protect them from animals.

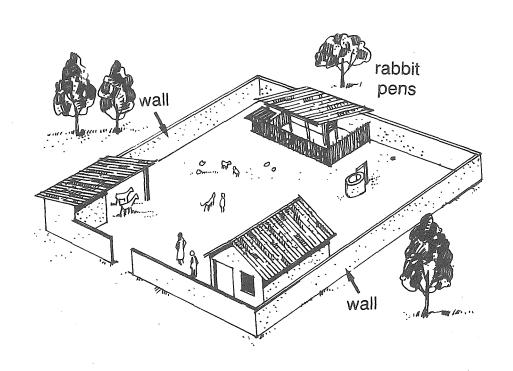
- 63. You have already been told that rabbits are easily frightened. So, try to choose a place that is quiet and peaceful, away from animals, people and noise.
- 64. You were also told that wind is bad for rabbits. So, try to choose a place that is protected from the wind.
- 65. Perhaps you have a place that is protected from wind by the walls of your house, a fence, some trees or a hill.



66. If it rains a lot where you live, put your pens in a place that is sheltered from the rain.
You can also **build** a shelter over the pens to protect your rabbits and keep them dry (see page 43 in this booklet).

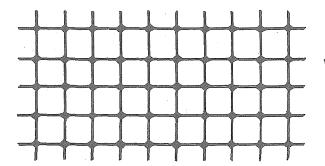


67. If you have a wall around your house and farm buildings, put your rabbit pens inside the wall, as shown below.



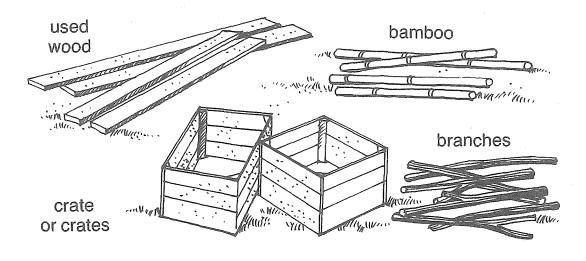
What materials can you use to build rabbit pens?

68. Wire mesh is the best material for building rabbit pens.
It lasts a long time and is easy to keep clean.
However, wire mesh may be hard to find and it costs a lot of money.



wire mesh 1.25×1.25 mm

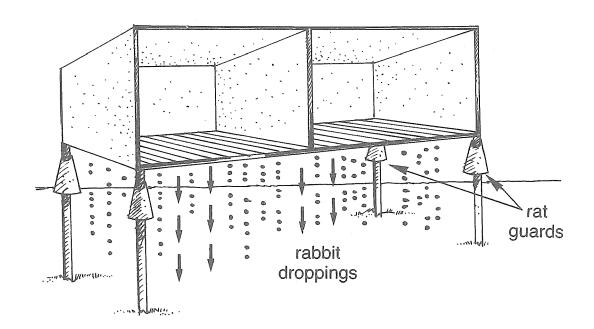
- 69. Later, if you begin to sell rabbits you may want to use some of the money that you make to buy wire mesh for your pens.
- 70. You will be shown how to build pens with wire mesh floors and walls in the next booklet in this series.
- 71. You can also build good pens using materials that cost little money such as used wood, old boxes, crates, poles from straight tree branches or bamboo.



BUILDING THE RABBIT PENS

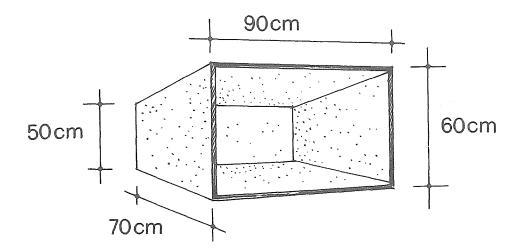
- 72. Whichever materials you use, it is best to build your pens side by side, as shown below. That way, two pens will share a wall and you will need fewer materials.
- 73. Build your pens on legs above the ground.

 That way, the rabbit droppings will fall to the ground and not collect on the floor.
- 74. In addition, a pen on legs will help to keep the rabbits safe from other animals.



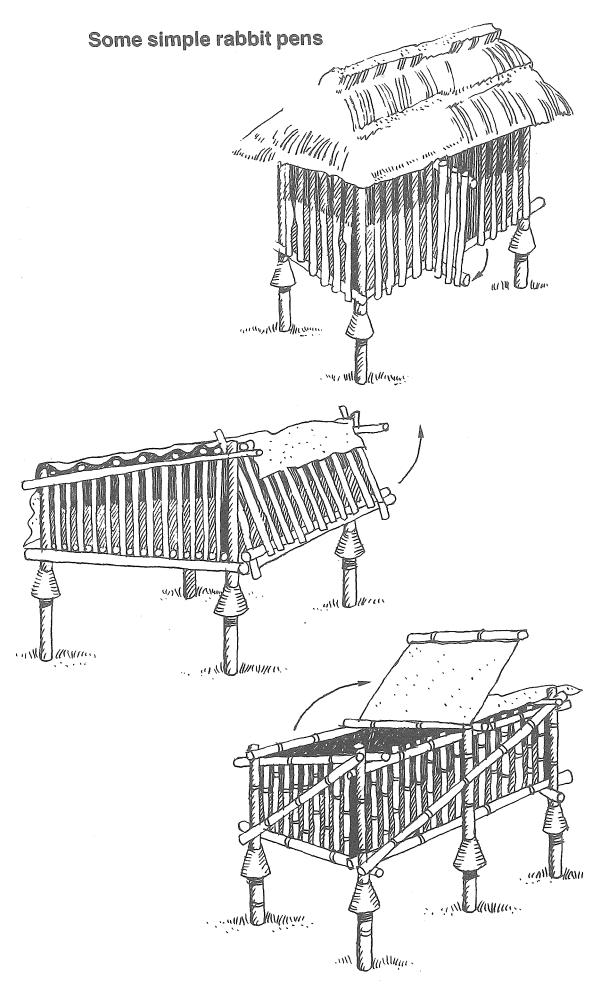
Note

Be sure to fit your pens with metal guards (see page 38) to keep rats and other small animals from getting to your rabbits. 75. A good size for a rabbit pen is 70 centimetres wide by 90 centimetres long and 50 to 60 centimetres high.



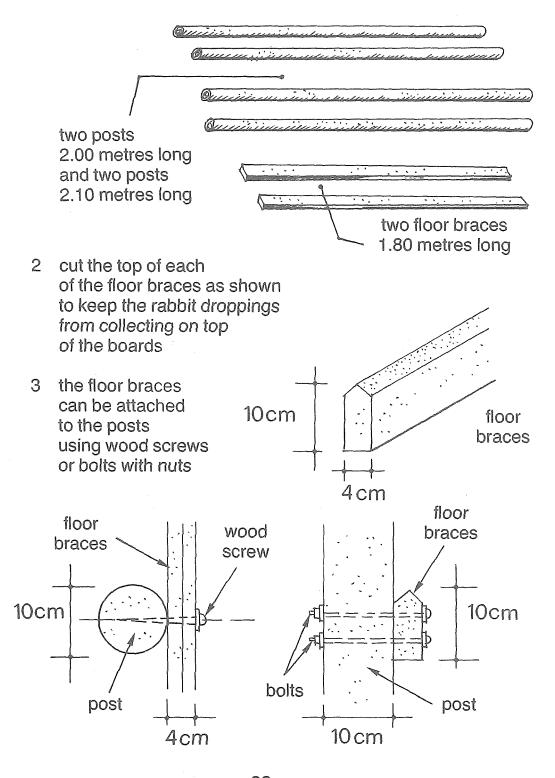
- 76. This size of pen is good both for full-grown and for young rabbits, so, you will need to build only one size of pen.
- 77. Make the inside of each pen as smooth as you can.
 This is to keep your rabbits from hurting themselves.
- 78. There are many ways to build pens. If you know another farmer who raises rabbits, perhaps you can get some good ideas from him.
- 79. The drawings on the next page show you several simple rabbit pens that you can build easily.
- 80. If you want to build a better pen, the drawings on pages 22 to 43 will show you how.

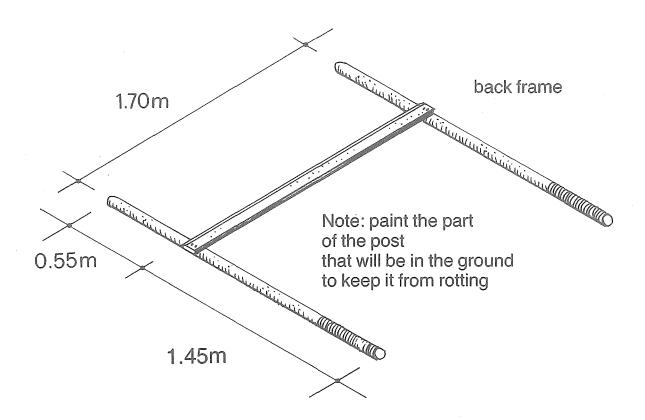
 You will also learn how to make feeders for plants and grain and how to build nest boxes.



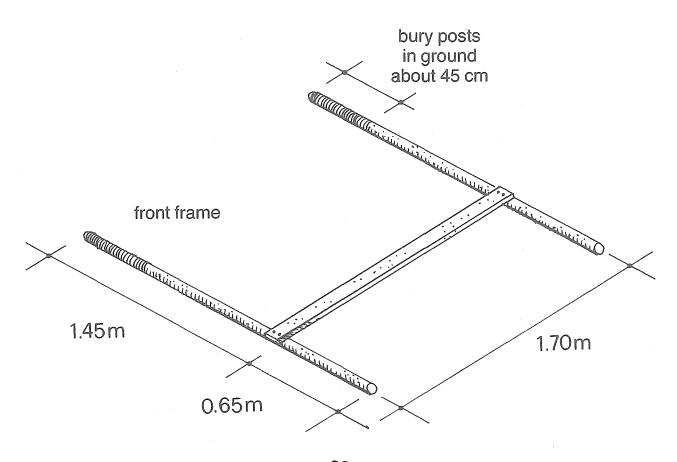
How to build better rabbit pens

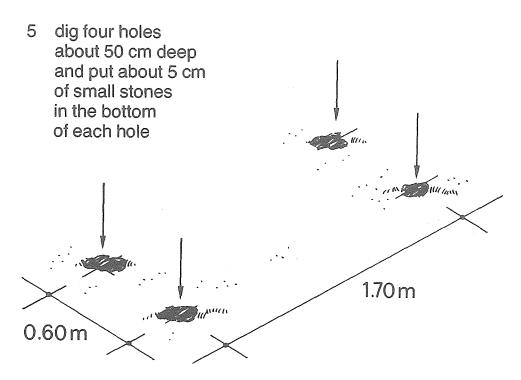
1 you will need four posts of about 10 cm in diameter for the legs and two boards of about 4 × 10 cm for the floor braces (each post should be buried in the ground about 45 cm)



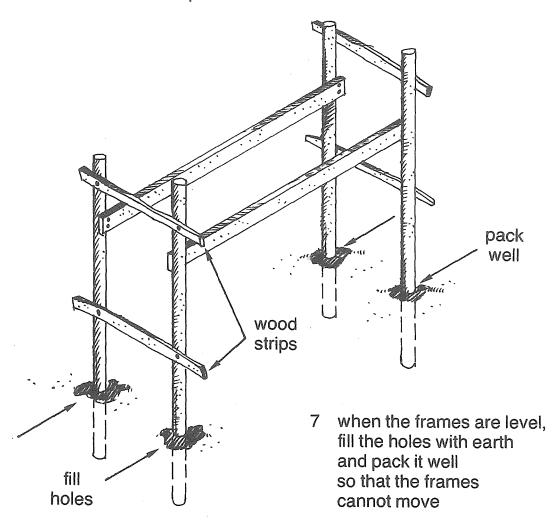


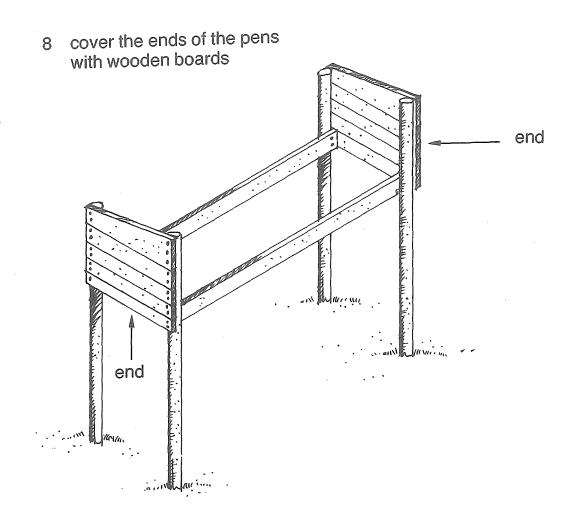
4 build the basic frames for the pens, one frame for the back and one frame for the front, as shown above and below

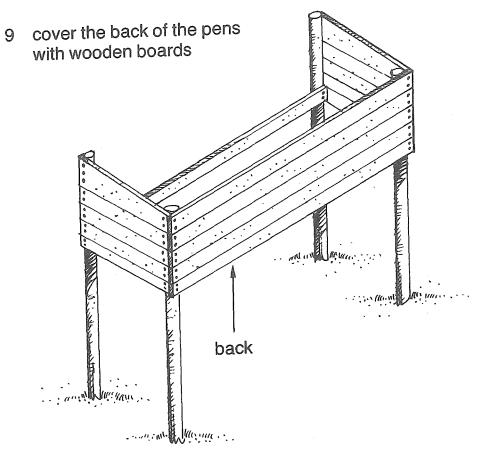


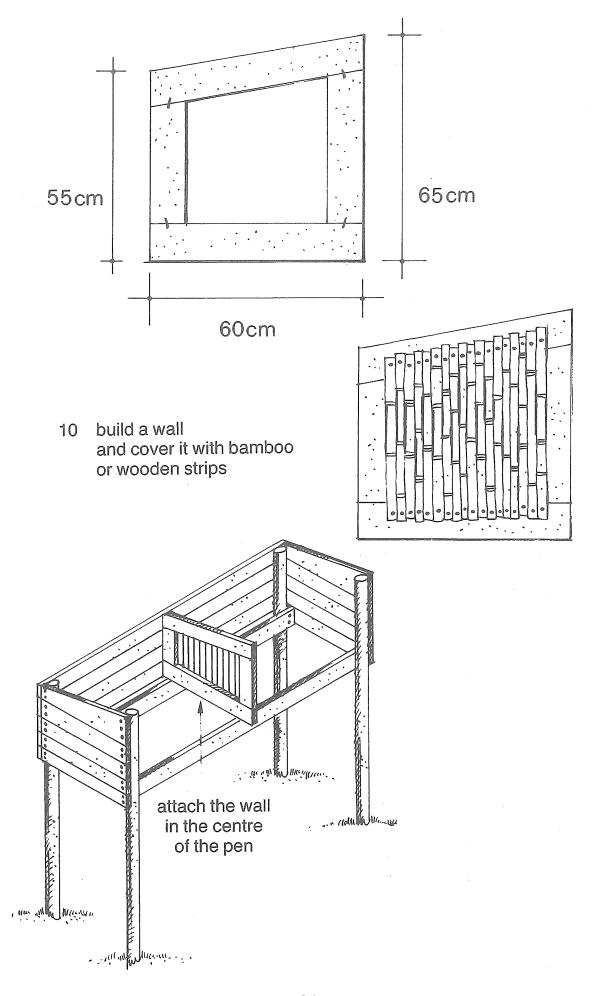


6 put the frames in the holes and hold them straight with wood strips

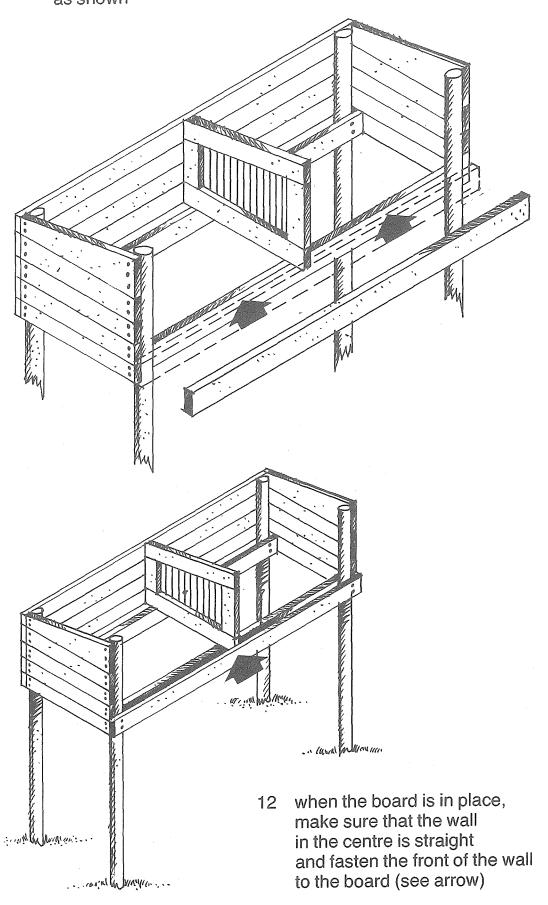




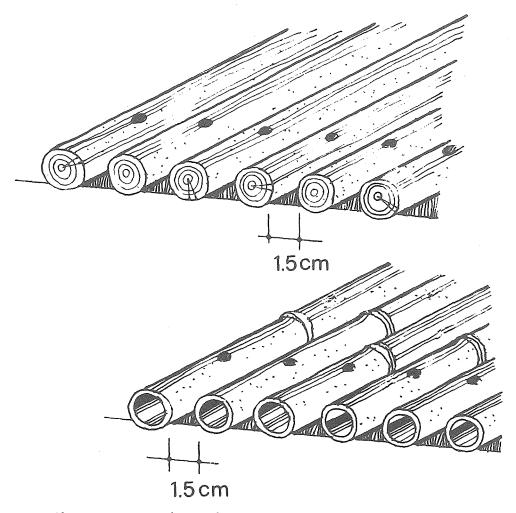




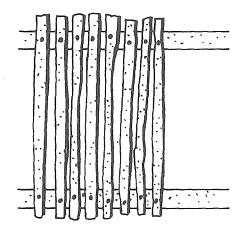
11 attach a 15-cm board to the front of the pens, as shown

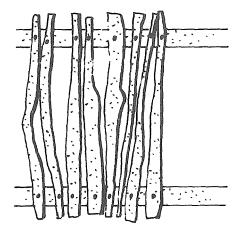


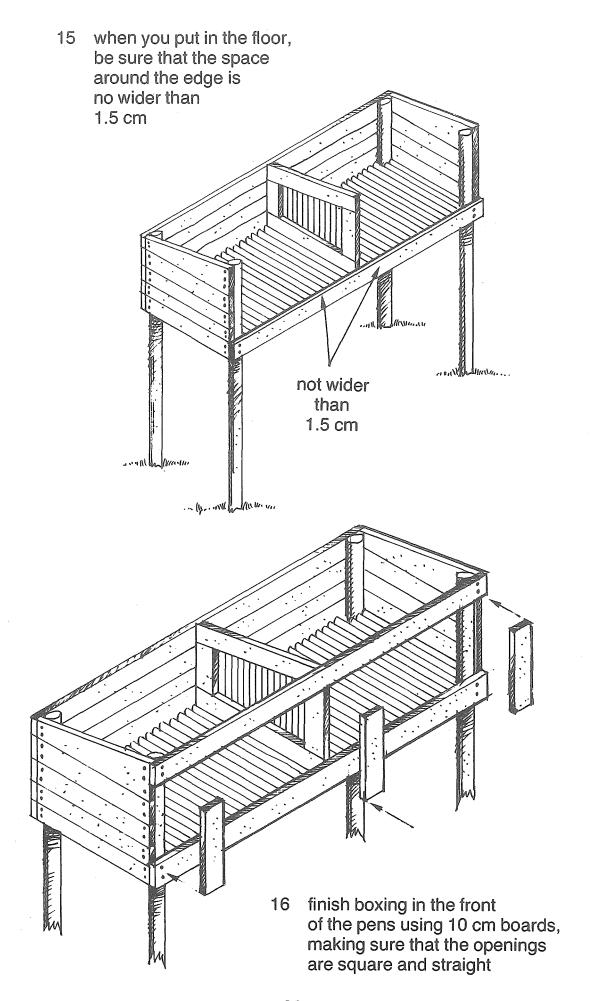
for the floor, you can use round pieces of wood, straight tree branches or pieces of bamboo about 3 cm in diameter, with a space of no more than 1.5 cm between them

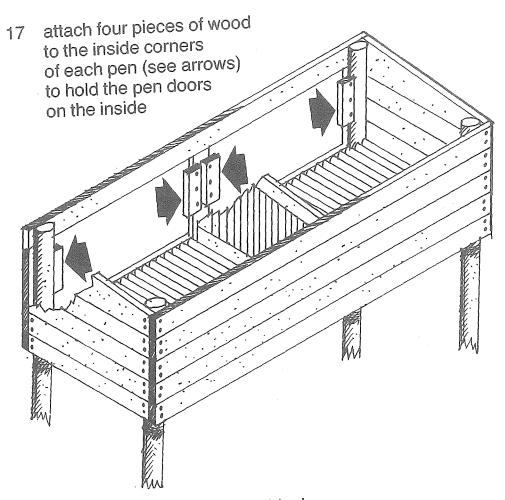


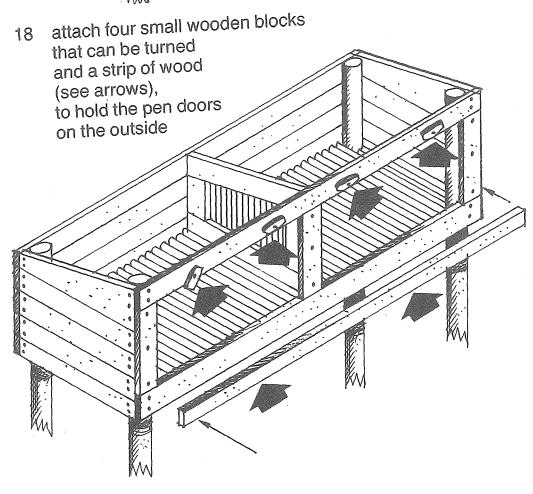
14 if you use tree branches, be sure that they are straight or your rabbits may catch their legs and hurt themselves



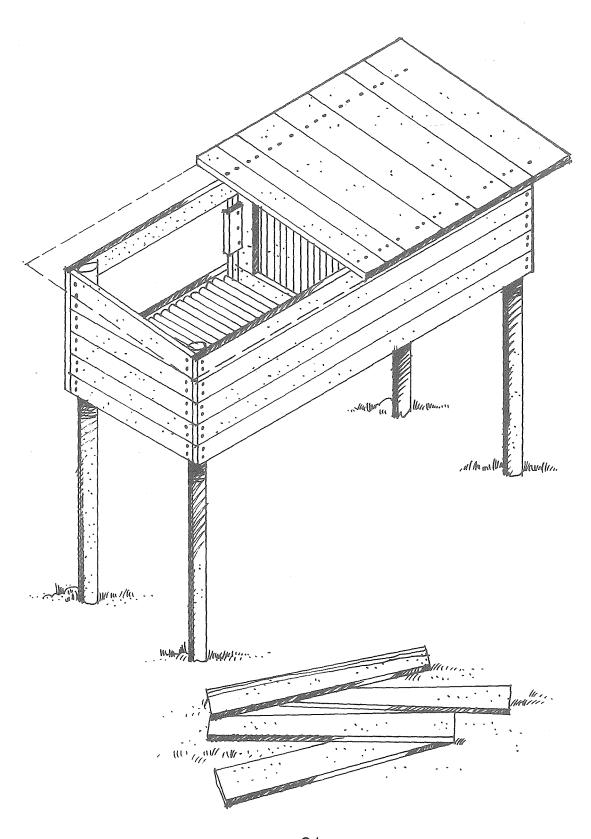


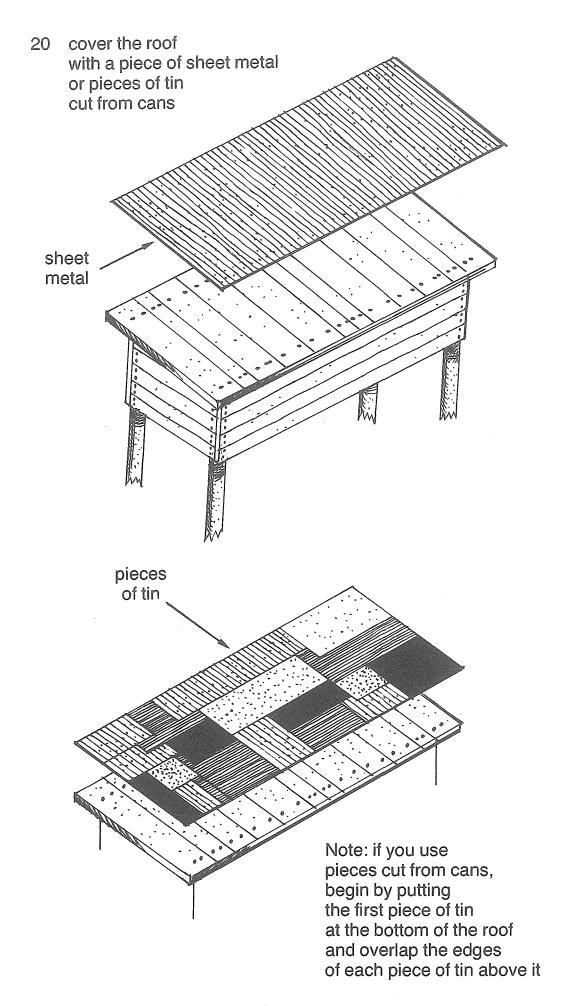


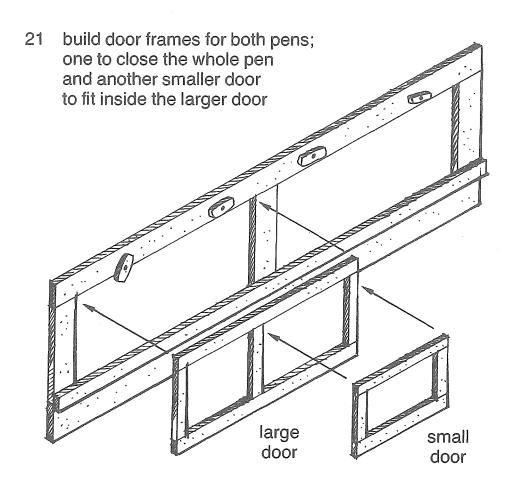




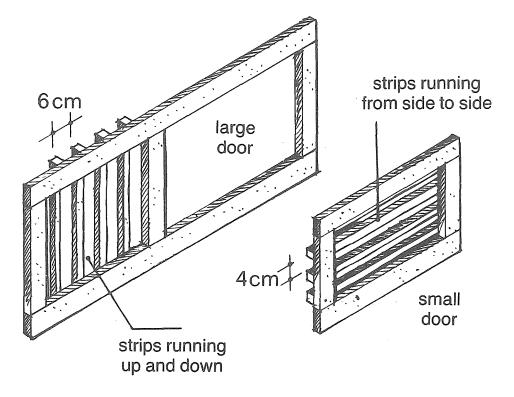
19 build a roof for the pens using wooden boards about 2 cm thick and of any width



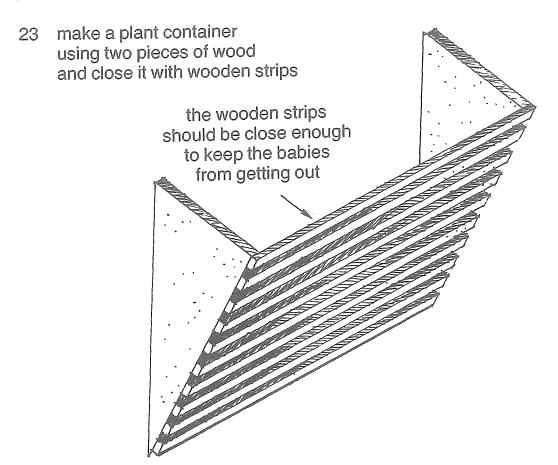




22 cover the inside of the large and small door with wooden strips as shown below

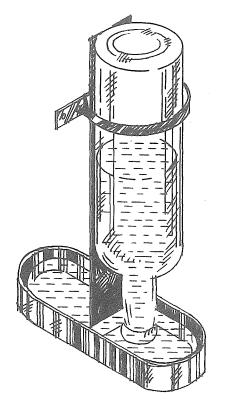


A plant feeder

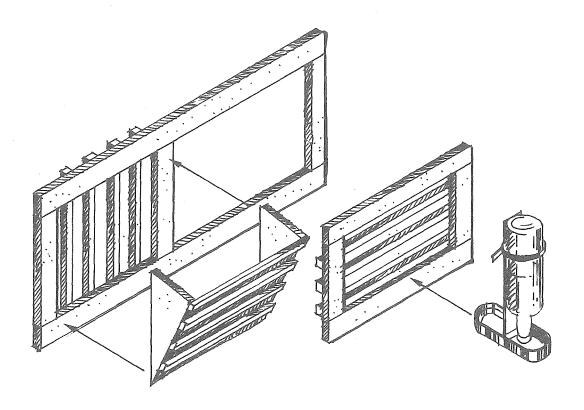


A water container

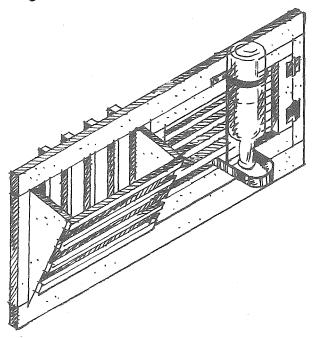
24 make a water container using a bottle and a tin, such as a sardine tin

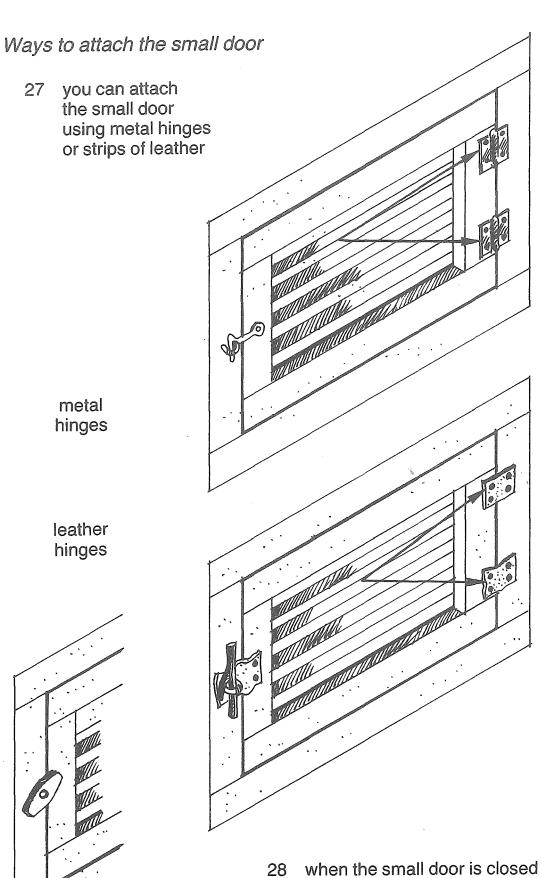


25 attach the plant container to the large door and the water container to the small door

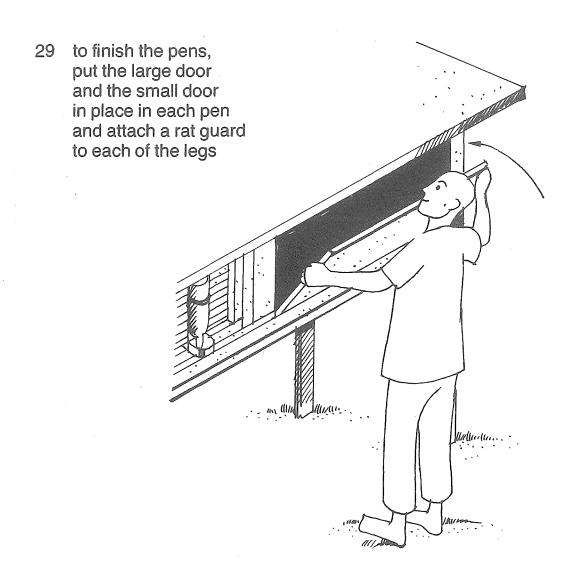


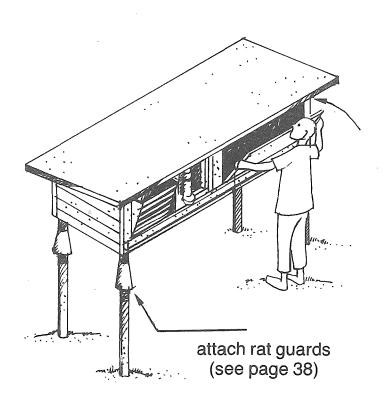
26 attach the small door to the large door

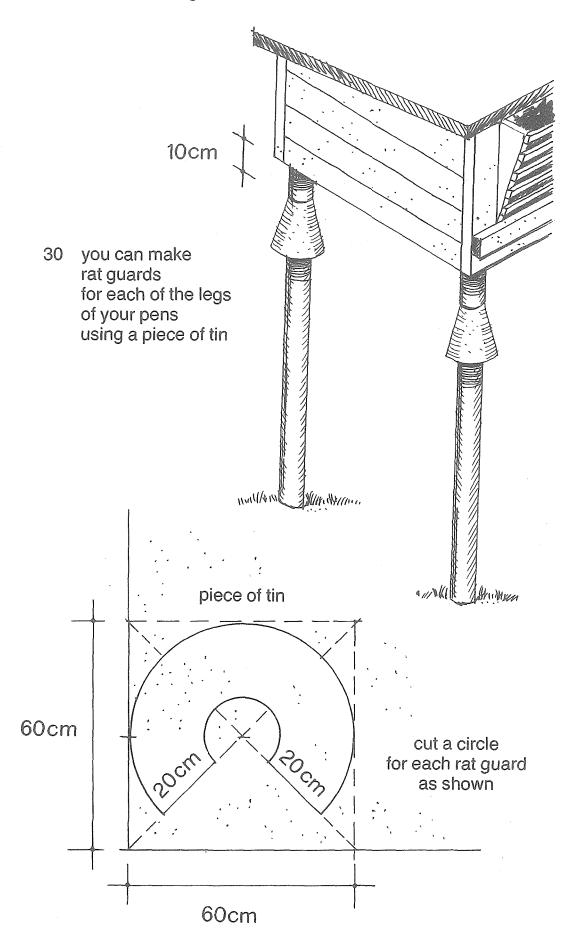




you can hold it in place
with a hook and eye,
a wooden block and screw,
or a leather strap
and a wooden pin

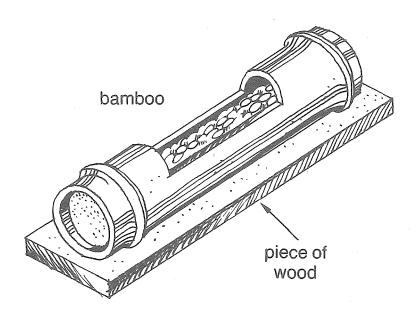


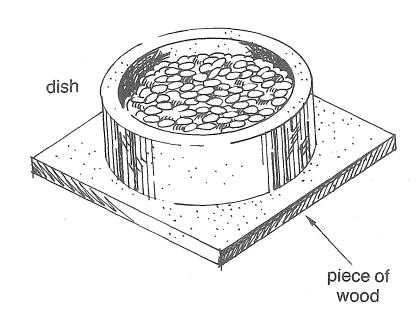




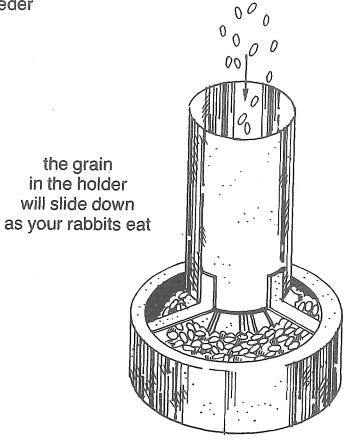
Three kinds of grain feeders

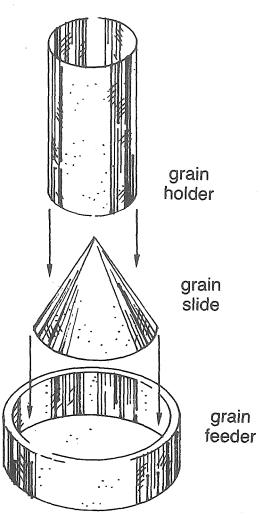
31 for a grain feeder
you can use
a hollow piece of bamboo
or a dish or other container.
Attach the freeder to a piece of wood
to keep the rabbits
from spilling their food



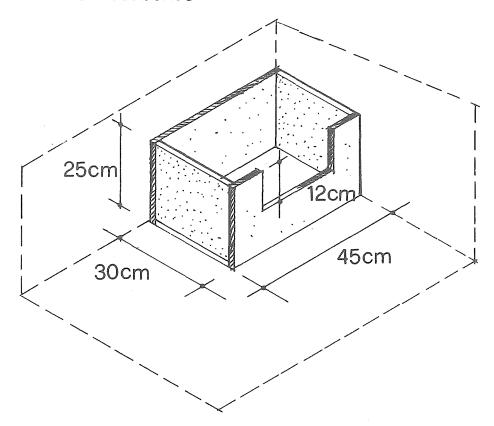


32 you can also make a grain feeder using tin or metal

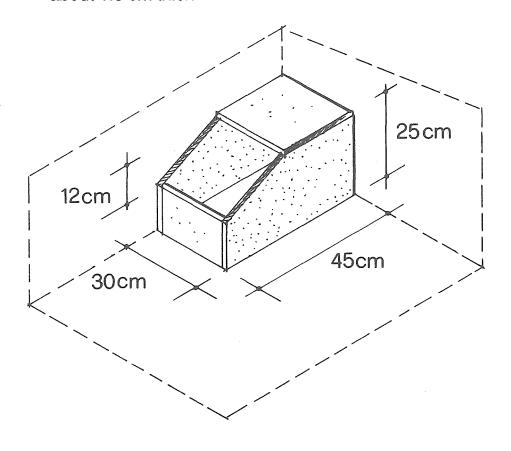




Two kinds of nest boxes

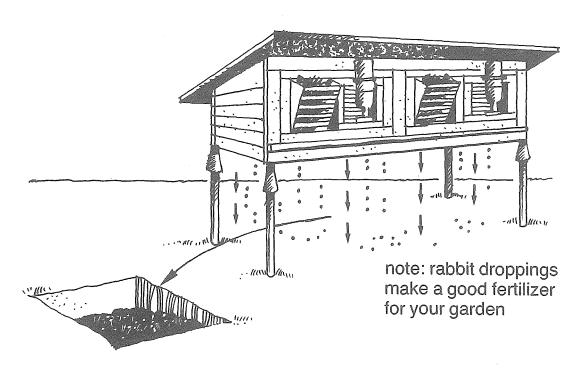


33 build a nest box for each female rabbit using wood about 1.5 cm thick

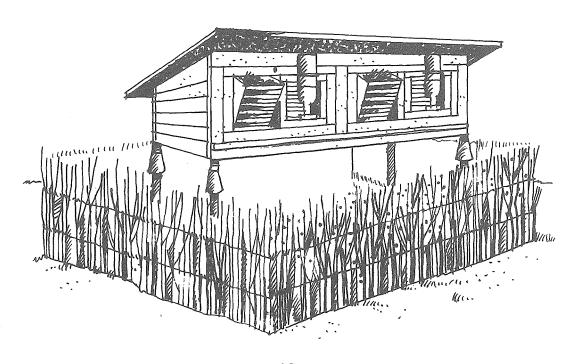


Some other ideas for your pens

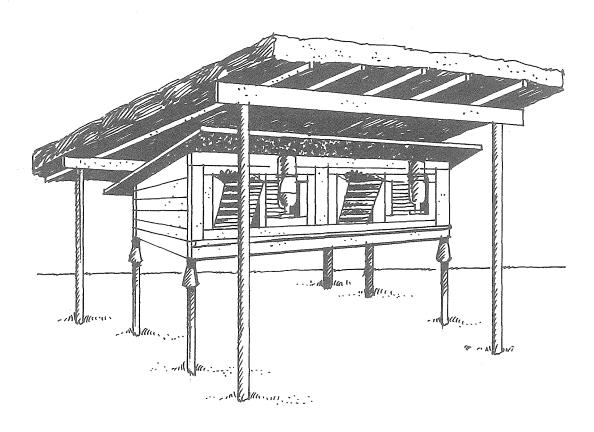
you can dig a pitnear your pensto hold the rabbit droppings



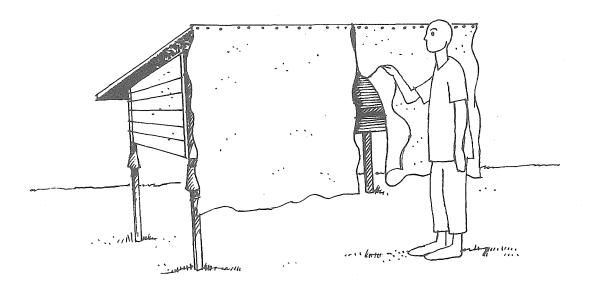
35 if there are small animals that might harm your rabbits, build a fence around your pens



36 if it rains a lot where you live, build a shelter over your pens to keep your rabbits dry



37 plastic sheets
that can be rolled up and down
will also help to keep
your rabbits dry
and to protect them from wind

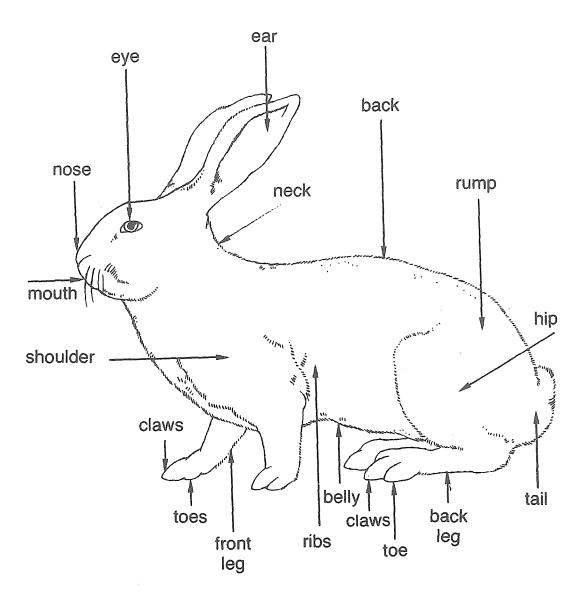


THE RABBITS

- 81. Now it is time to buy your full-grown rabbits.
 You will have to learn how to choose healthy rabbits.
- 82. Let us begin by learning the parts of a rabbit.
 This will help you when you choose yours.
- 83. Below is a drawing of a rabbit.

 Look at it carefully

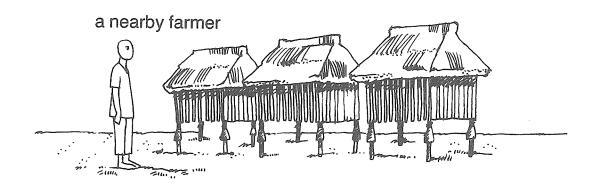
 and learn the name of each part.

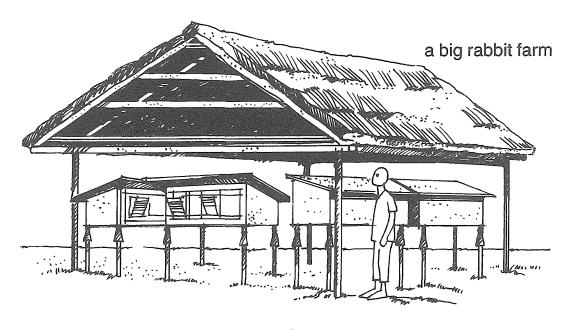


Choosing good rabbits

- 84. It is best to buy your rabbits from a place where you can go to see them before you buy them.
- 85. This way you can be sure that they have been kept clean, that all the rabbits are healthy and that they have been well cared for.
- 86. Perhaps you can visit a nearby farmer who raises his own rabbits.

 There may even be a big rabbit farm near where you live.

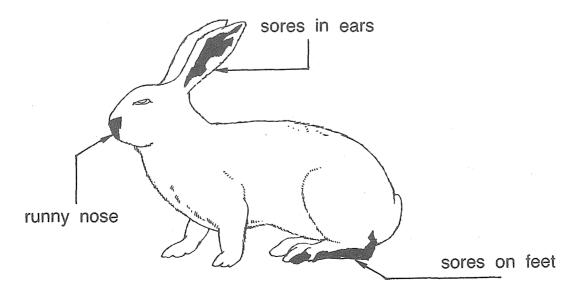




- 87. Try to find out as much as you can about the rabbits that you may buy. Here are some things that you should look for when you are choosing your rabbits.
- 88. Look carefully at each rabbit to see that it is active and moves well.
- 89. Never buy a rabbit that moves slowly or looks dull and sleepy.

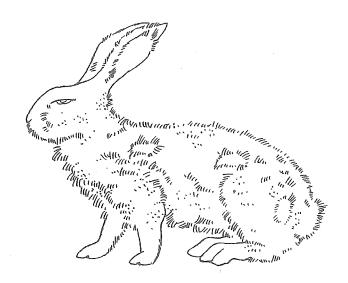


- 90. Look to see that each rabbit has bright eyes, a dry nose and clean ears and feet.
- 91. Never buy a rabbit with a runny nose, or with sores in its ears or on its feet.



- 92. Look at its fur.

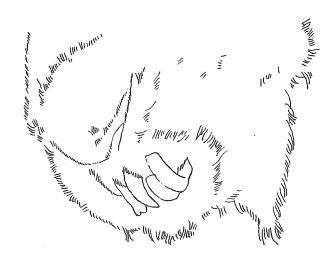
 The fur of a healthy rabbit is smooth and clean.
- 93. Never buy a rabbit with fur that is rough or dirty or grows in patches.



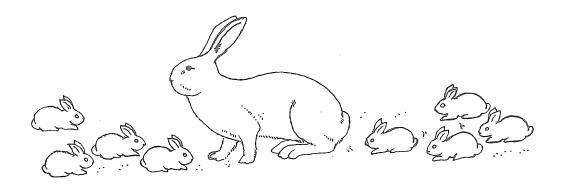
- 94. Look at its teeth.

 The front grinding teeth
 of a rabbit should be in line.
- 95. Never buy a rabbit if the grinding teeth are crooked or out of line.

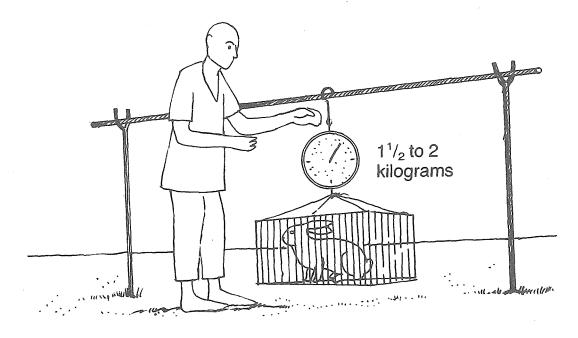
 Teeth that are out of line grow and grow until the rabbit cannot eat.



96. Try to get rabbits from females that have five or six babies at a time.

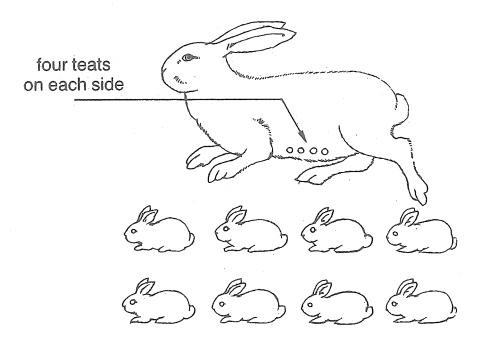


97. Try to get rabbits that grew well and were healthy when they were young and that weighed 1¹/₂ to 2 kilograms when they were **three** to **four** months old.



- 98. Rabbits that come from big families, that grow well and weigh a lot when they are young are more likely to have big families and big, healthy baby rabbits.
- 99. When you buy your rabbits, make sure that your female and your male rabbits are not brothers and sisters.

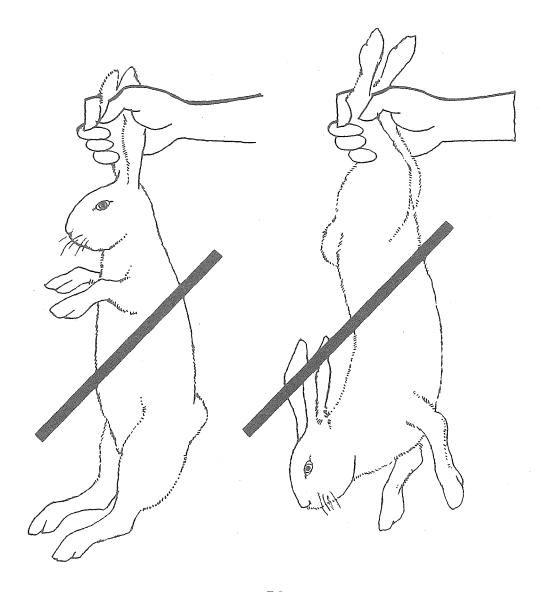
100. The female rabbits that you choose should have eight teats so that they can feed eight babies.



- 101. With most kinds of rabbits, females are ready to mate when they are 4 to $4^{1}/_{2}$ months old. Male rabbits are ready a little later, when they are 5 to $5^{1}/_{2}$ months old.
- 102. So, when you first begin, try to get rabbits that are old enough to mate, so that you can begin to raise your own baby rabbits as soon as you can.
- 103. When you have decided what rabbits to buy, find out what kinds of food they have been eating.
- 104. This will help you to know what to feed them when you get them home.
 You may even be able to take home some of this food to feed them for the first few days.

How to handle your rabbits

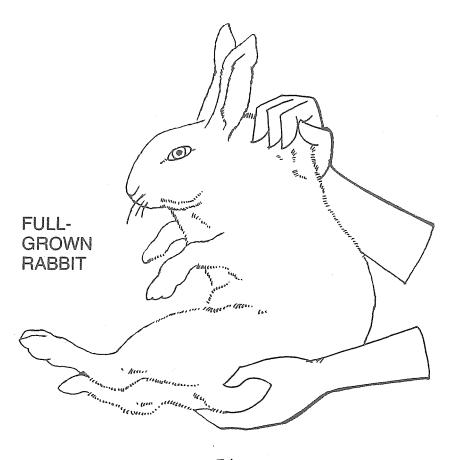
- 105. Rabbits must be handled with great care in order not to hurt them.
- 106. When you pick up a rabbit hold it firmly but gently.
- 107. Make no sudden movements or you may frighten the rabbit and it will begin to struggle or scratch you.
- 108. Remember, never pick up a rabbit by the legs or the ears or you may hurt it.



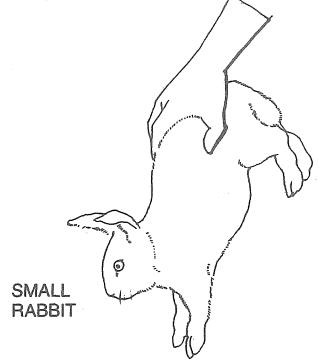
109. Now let us learn the right way to pick up rabbits of different sizes and how to carry them.

Full-grown rabbits, small rabbits and heavy rabbits

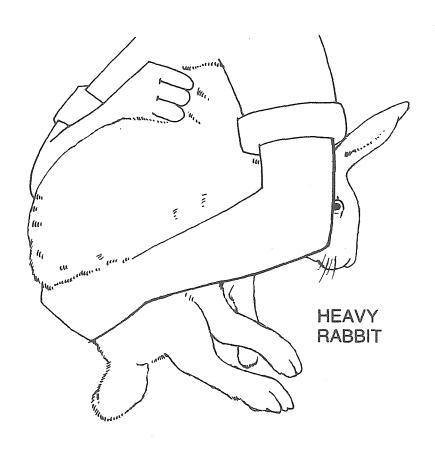
- 110. When a rabbit is **full-grown** the skin over the shoulders at the back of the neck is very loose.
- 111. Gently grasp this loose skin with one hand to hold the rabbit and put the other hand under the rabbit to pick it up.
- 112. When you lift the rabbit, the hand under the animal should carry nearly all of the weight.



113. A small rabbit can be lifted and carried by holding it firmly between the hips and the ribs with the head hanging down.



114. With a heavy rabbit, gently grasp the loose skin at the back of the neck with one hand and put the head of the rabbit behind the elbow of the other arm.

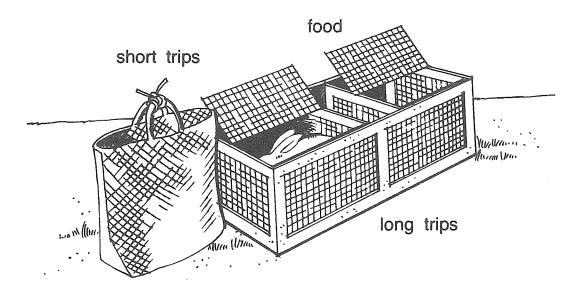


115. Hold the heavy rabbit firmly against your side with the lower part of this arm and put the other arm under the rabbit.

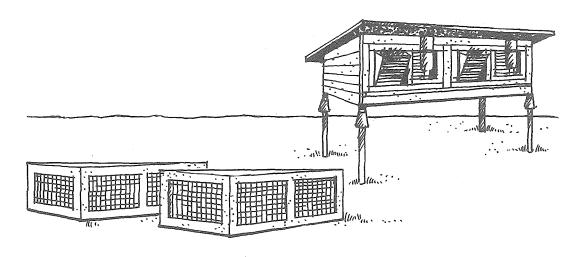
Bringing your rabbits home

- 116. When you bring your rabbits home you will have to be very careful not to frighten them or they may get sick or die.

 So, move them quietly and gently.
- 117. Do not give any food to rabbits the night before you move them. It is not good to move a rabbit when its stomach is full. However, if the trip is long they should be given water from time to time.
- 118. It is best to move each rabbit in a separate container such as a crate or a basket with a lid that can be closed. However, the containers you use should let in plenty of fresh air during the trip.

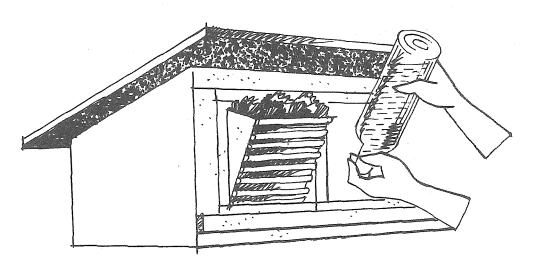


- 119. If the weather is hot, move your rabbits early in the morning.
 If the weather is cooler, move them in the evening.
- 120. When you reach home, put the containers down gently near the pens.
 Let the rabbits rest and become calm while you prepare their pens.

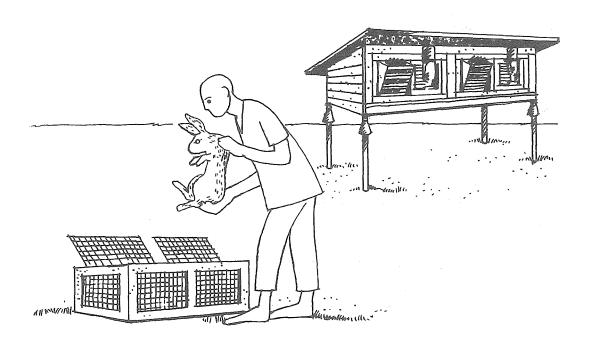


Preparing the pens and putting in the rabbits

121. Put fresh food and water in the pens.This will help your rabbits to feel at home and to settle down more quickly.

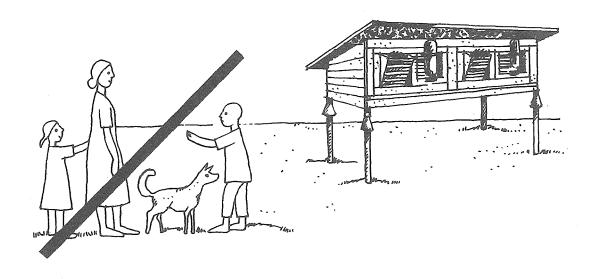


- 122. If you were able to bring home some of the food that they were used to eating (see Item 104 in this booklet), use that.
- 123. If you were not able to bring home some of the food that they were used to eating, try to give them something that is nearly the same.
- 124. When the pens are ready, lift the rabbits carefully out of their containers and put them gently in their pens.



- 125. You have already been told that it is best to have the same person take care of the rabbits all of the time.
- 126. So, this person should put the rabbits in their pens and take care of them from now on.

- 127. Now, let your rabbits settle down.
 Stay away from them
 as much as you can
 until they become used to the pen.
- 128. Do not bring people to see them.
 Do not let your children
 play near the rabbit pens.
 Do not let dogs or cats
 or other animals near them.



129. In Booklet No. 37, Raising rabbits: part 2, you will learn

- what to feed your rabbits, when to feed them and how much to give them
- how to mate full-grown rabbits and raise your own baby rabbits
- how to take care of your rabbits
- when and how to use or sell rabbits.
- 130. You will be told some other things that you can do to raise rabbits better in the section on **Further improvement.**



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