

BONDING

101



A step by step guide to maximize bonding success

*Hay Monsters does not guarantee a successful bond, nor can we be held liable for injuries that may occur during bonding sessions. These steps work for us. Use this guide at your discretion.

GETTING STARTED

The space -

- Both rabbits should be housed in a way that they can see and smell one another, but not be able to nip or bite at each other. The closer the better, a 2" gap between the pens is recommended.
- Housing size should be no less than 3' by 4' per rabbit, and there should be a top on at least one pen so that they cannot jump into each other's space before you want them to!
- This set up should be maintained until they are ready to live together.

The Monsters -

- Both rabbits should be spayed or neutered before introduction.
- If one or both are not, the minimum recommended wait time after surgery for introduction should be 4 weeks (6 to 8 is ideal).
- NEVER try to introduce rabbits that are not "fixed".
- Male/Male or Female/Male bonds are typically the easiest.
- While breed, size and age do not matter, having a similar size and age can make a few aspects of their life together a bit easier.
- Both should be free of any health concerns and off of any medications.
- Having them on the same diet is pretty helpful, too.

MOVING FORWARD

Pre Introduction Steps-

- Food is a great way to bring the monsters closer together. Feed pellets, treats, veggies in a way that their noses are as close together as possible while they are eating. They should be having dinner together every night!
- If there is zero aggression shown from either of your monsters, start scent swapping! Trade their toys, blankets, and even litter boxes every few days. This gets them used to being around each other's things, and sharing theirs.
- Positive reinforcement! Try to save treats for when you see them sitting near each other or laying side by side against the bars.
- Continue with these steps as long as you want, until you're ready for real dates!

THE DATING

Set the Mood-

- Dates should be held in a calm, quiet space.
- "Neutral Territory" is always best, if you have it. This is just an area where no bunny is familiar with, to avoid territory issues.
- There should be nowhere in the dating area where your monsters can get away from you. Use a pen if you have one, or block off areas where they could hide.
- Have treats ready to help reinforce positive behavior.

Quality over quantity-

- Start with short dates, let them sniff and interact, maybe even a little humping if everyone is cool with it. If it bums you out, gently stop them and distract with treat.
- Circling and chasing should also be gently stopped. Distract with treats again.

- Try not to end a date on a bad note. If there's a full on fight (tornado) that would be the only time to end on a negative. You may want gloves or a broom nearby in case you do have to stop a tornado. They aren't common but when it happens there are usually innocent casualties (i.e., your hand).
- Sniffs, little nips, hops, bounces and head bowing are good signs.
- If you think it's going REALLY well, end it. I know. It's sad. They'll be fine, absence makes the heart grow fonder, you know.

So, like, are they bonded?

Signs they can move in together:

- Grooming each other.
- Snuggling.
- Humping from one party is tolerated by the other, and reducing in frequency.

- Sharing litter boxes, beds or any belongings.
- Lounging flopped in the same space regularly.
- Disagreements/humping is diminishing or done.

Wait, you're SURE this is fine?

Some behaviors cause concern, but are actually fine. A lot of pairs are probably kept apart much longer than necessary because they're not given the proper amount of time to decide who's boss. Dominance is super important to animals.

- Let the humping happen. I know. It's awkward. They don't think so, though, so unless the humpee is obviously scared or getting aggressive, just..let it go.
- Butt Nipping. Again, looks bad, but it usually just means "Hey you have to groom me now".
- Chases. They just wanna see who will win. Let them figure that out, too. As long as you get no grunts, growls, or tornados, you're good!

