

Breeding Rabbits

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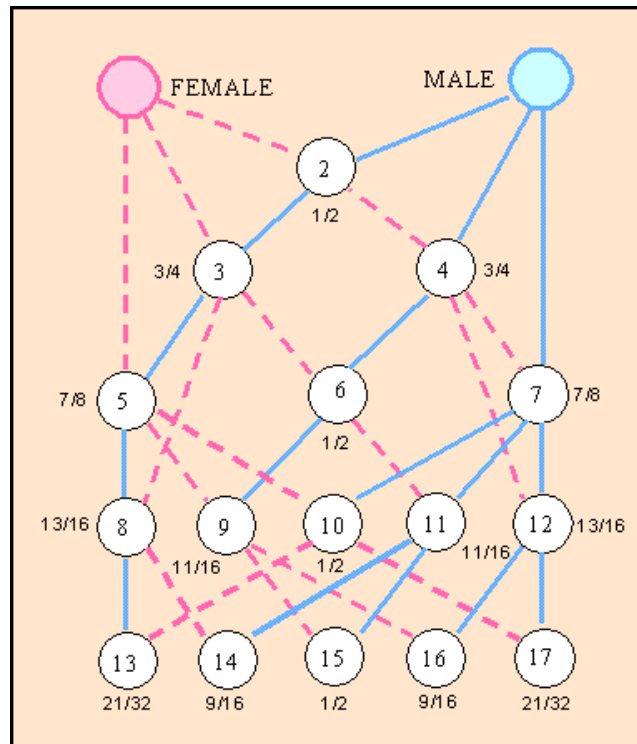
Well first, there are some things to think about before breeding.

- Are you prepared for the fact that some or even all the babies might die?
- Do you have ideas for what you will do with the babies when they are old enough to need their own cages and/or sell?
- While it rarely happens, the does do sometimes die during birth
- Timing: will you be around when they are due? (31 days after being breed, the span being 28-35 days from date breed)

There are also some things to know and decide on. Don't just breed willy-nilly!

1. Know your lines. By this I mean, the families that the buck and doe came from. This can be seen on the pedigree, and is the first part (prefix) to the rabbit's name (ex: Naragon's Nike would be Todd Naragon's lines. ARR's Yang would be Amy's Rabbit Ranch lines.) Some lines are not "compatible" and even two really nice rabbits will produce 'ugly' offspring. This can take some research and just general experience.
2. Have a nestbox built, bought, or to be built/bought soon! The nestbox needs to be given to the doe filled with fresh straw or hay 26 days after being breed.
3. Have some goals in mind. Breeding "just to see what happens" is NOT a goal, and is what often leads to problems. At least have some ideas on what you want to learn and accomplish. If it's just to raise your own rabbit, then that's fine, but have some pre-set goal and know what you are going to do with the babies you aren't keeping. Random breeding is what causes overpopulation problems. A true breeder works to better the breed they are working on by selective careful breeding and culling. And no, cull does not just mean killing. It can mean anything from petting out the ones that would not further the breed to yes, using them for purposes such as meat. It is up to the breeder.
4. Breeding Theories:
 - In-Breeding: Generally not a good idea. This is the breeding of closely related relatives. It often causes genetic problems within a few generations.
 - Cross-breeding: Breeding between two different breeds/species. This gives the mixed breeds and is not a good idea.

- **Out Crossing:** This is breeding between totally unrelated rabbits (same breed) It is not good or bad. It can ruin years of work or it can help it. Really, it depends on the rabbits. I have had success with it, and also have failed with it. It's a more "trial and error" way to get good quality rabbits.
- **Line Breeding:** This is the "safest" way to breed. Line breeding is a form of in-breeding that follows a specific pattern. Breed two rabbits from compatible lines but not well-related, from the litter breed a male back to the mother, and female back to the father. From those litters breed a buck and doe together. Continue working down the line. This type of familial breeding is generally considered safe for 4-5 generations and is a good way to solidify the good traits in your line. However, it also tends to bring out bad traits, so it's a balancing act. Here's an illustration to make it clearer:



5. Keep good records! Get a 3-ring binder or folder. I find it easiest to use page protectors and slide the pedigrees in. Records you need to keep are: Pedigrees, breeding records, expense records, and a list of contacts for people interested in buying the babies later on. If you show, keep the show records.

There are different ways of breeding rabbits. It isn't always as simple as taking the buck to the doe's cage and letting nature take its course. While that is by far the easiest, there are different theories of the best way to breed rabbits to get the highest number of conceptions and larger litters. Also, whoever started the "breed like rabbits" cliché never tried to raise them!

One way is to take the doe to the buck's cage, and, if they aren't hurting each other, just leaving them together. Watch first and make sure the buck does get a good mount (he'll grunt and fall of to the side). Then just let them be for a few days-checking of course to make sure

they're getting along. It's a simple and easy way to breed, but it can be dangerous to just leave them together unsupervised. Often though, it does increase litter size because the buck gets more good mounts. If the doe is unreceptive, this is a good way of coaxing her to be interested.

Another way that I find quite good is to take the doe to the buck, let him get one good mount, then separate them. In one hour, take the doe to the buck again, let him get a good mount, separate them. Repeat again in twelve hours, and then twelve hours after that. (So a total of four times, hour zero, one, twelve, and 24). I have good luck with this technique, and my average Holland litter size is 4-5.

Sometimes the bucks are just too comfortable in their cage and don't want to breed. In this case it helps to get them in a new environment-namely the table. A grooming table or some other table with a carpet square on it works well. Put the buck on the table first, let him get a bit accustomed to it, then bring him the doe. Let him mount once or twice, and put them both back. Follow the same thing as above - doing four or so breedings - just put them on the table instead of the buck's cage.

If the bucks are uncooperative, they may be lazy or fat. Usually this can be solved by just not feeding them right before they are breed. Wait until evening to breed, then after he services the doe feed him. Usually, it's the does that are not very cooperative. Although contrary to popular belief, a doe does have somewhat of a cycle of approximately 12 days where she is receptive and a few days when she isn't. Her genitals should be a nice deep pink (but not dark pink or purple) for best receptiveness. If it's pale pink, wait a day or two and check again. They are induced ovulators, however, meaning that the doe will release the eggs upon copulation.

If all else fails, the doe should be receptive, the buck is a happy guy, but she's just not lifting for him, you can try and help. Place one hand on her head holding it down and the other hand under her rear, lifting it up. Make sure her tail is not tucked under. Usually the buck doesn't mind the help, and I've done this successfully many times. Sometimes just lifting her rear up a bit gives her the idea, and as the buck tries to mount you can feel her start to lift herself and the mating is successful. I usually check the doe's tail and genitals afterwards to be sure he made it and didn't miss, just wetting the top of her tail or something.

Don't forget to write down who was bred, the date to palpate, and the date they are due! Palpating is a technique easier shown than explained, so ask a breeder friend to show you if you don't know how. It is usually done between days 10-16, and normally on smaller breeds I find it easiest more towards days 8-10, personally. Put the doe facing you on a carpet square. Reach around her with one hand to her rear, grab by the rump and lift up some while sliding your other hand around the other side of her and underneath her, below her ribs to her "tummy" area. A rabbit has two uterine horns so babies may be on either side, they will be to each side of the midline. Feel for small round bumps, like grapes. Be careful to not mistake a kidney for a baby - kidneys will be larger and higher up. This is one reason I find it easier to palpate around day 10 because the babies to me feel more different from a kidney at this point. Like I said, easier to have someone show you what to feel for!