

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ANGORA RABBIT CARE

ANGORA BASICS

Angora is a luxury fiber with many special qualities. Lustrous, soft, and seven times warmer than sheep's wool, these fibers have an inner structure of air and cell that give Angora yarn and garments a thermal quality. In addition, the fibers "bloom" or fluff up as garments are worn and cared for which increases their warmth and elegant appearance.

An Angora rabbit is a fiber producing animal. The wool is plucked, combed, or clipped and spun into a luxurious yarn. This does not harm the rabbit; the wool is ready to shed and removing it will help keep the rabbit in good condition.

The following are some common questions asked by beginning rabbit owners.

What type of housing do I need?

An all-wire cage is best for an Angora rabbit because this keeps him off the wet and soiled bedding. The sides of the cages should be made of 2" x 1" wire, and the floor should be made of 1/2" x 1" wire. A 30"x30" cage is an ideal size. You can also use 24"x30" but no smaller. If the cage is outside, the Angora also needs a cover to protect it from the rain, snow, and drafts, and to keep him shaded in the summer.

Does the rabbit get cold outside?

Angoras are very hardy and do well in cold weather. His coat needs to be kept well-groomed and free of matts (tangled wool) because matted wool does not insulate him from the cold. A piece of plastic or plywood on three sides of his cage will protect him from wind and drafts in the winter. On the coldest nights, you can throw a blanket over the cage for added protection.

What about hot summer weather?

Rabbits do suffer from the heat. A well ventilated, shaded Rabbitry will help. On those really unbearable days, place a plastic 2-liter soda bottle which has been filled with water and frozen in the rabbit's cage for him to lie against.

What does the rabbit eat?

Angoras eat from 4-8 ounces of pellets daily, depending on their mature weight. A handful of hay is important for fiber production. About 1 tablespoon of sunflower seeds is a good daily supplement and the seed's oil helps the rabbit's digestion. Rabbits must have fresh water at all times.

How much fiber will an Angora produce?

English, French and Satin Angoras can yield 10-16 ounces of wool per year; however Giants can produce up to 28 - 40 ounces per year. Since Angora is lighter and warmer than sheep's wool, this will go a long way.

GROOMING

Whether you choose to use the fiber your Angora produces or not, the rabbit's wool must be removed when it is shedding. This will help keep your rabbit healthy.

Do I need special tools?

Dog grooming equipment is commonly used to groom Angora rabbits. A steel toothed comb, a bulb-tipped brush, a slicker brush (recommend a 'Doggy Man' brush by Miller Forge), and a pair of scissors are handy tools. You may also find it beneficial to have a grooming table and of course the pet blower. You need to be sure the pet blower has enough force to blow the coat open so you can see to the skin.

How often do I groom the rabbit?

Grooming your animal once a week should keep him in good condition until he is ready to molt, but more frequent attention and handling will help you both become accustomed to one another.

How do I groom the rabbit?

To maintain an Angora that is not molting, either put the rabbit on your lap or on a table. The purpose of this grooming session is to comb/brush through the wool over the entire animal. Pay particular attention to areas that rub against one another such as the base of the tail or behind the ears. Be sure to brush his legs and belly. You may also find a pet blower to be of great assistance so you are blowing the coat more and brushing less to keep the fiber on the rabbit.

How do I remove the matts?

If the matt can be pulled apart with your fingers, the wool is "webbed" and may be gently combed out. If the matt seems like a solid mass of wool, then the kindest way to remove it is simply cut it off. Feel for the rabbit's skin first, and watch out for its tail; it's longer than you may think so you don't cut part or all of it off.

How often does the rabbit shed?

It really depends on the rabbit; today most rabbits will keep their coat at least nine months before shedding. If you are a spinner you may want to remove the coat every two to three months so it has a good staple to spin.

How do I know when to pluck the rabbit?

Your rabbit is ready to pluck when you see loose wool on the cage or trailing off his back.

How do I pluck the rabbit?

Go over the rabbit with a comb or bulb-tipped brush. This helps loosen the wool. Gently pull out the loose wool, keeping your fingers toward the tip of the wool to catch only the longest coat. You may want to hold the skin with your other hand to reduce stress. You may also want to clip or shear the rabbit of its wool. The type of scissor you use is up to you but it is usually good to start with a very short blade scissor. Always keep the bottom of the scissor blade against the body so as not to cut the rabbit. Depending on the size of the blade you will most likely cut the coat to about a quarter to half inch in length from the skin. Also don't worry about making it even as the coat will eventually grow back in even in length.

How do I store the wool?

A plastic box, shoe box, or cookie tin will keep the fiber from getting tangled or packed down. You can also put it in tissue paper, fold it and put it in a ziplock bag. Always put a label in the bag. You may want to include the name of the rabbit, color, when the coat was removed, etc. You may want to put a moth ball in the box or herbs to discourage insects.

What about the toenails?

Your rabbit's toenails should be clipped monthly. A pair of dog clippers may be used. Like a dog, the living part of the rabbit's nail extends into the nail, so be careful not to cut into this or your rabbit may bleed. You may wish to examine the rabbit's nail with a light behind it so you can see where the dark vein extends into the nail.

WOOL BLOCK

Wool block is a mass of wool caught in the rabbit's digestive system, similar to a fur ball in a cat. The rabbit ingests the wool when grooming them. Angoras cannot regurgitate the wool like a cat does, and the blockage gives the rabbit a full feeling, so it does not eat. Wool block can be fatal.

What are the symptoms of wool block?

Your rabbit may begin to excrete smaller or misshapen droppings and may not finish his food or water. He may pass no droppings at all.

How do I treat a case of wool block?

Immediately pluck or shear the rabbit. Withdraw your rabbit's pellets and feed only rolled oats or hay. Pellets only add to the blockage at this point. Always provide water. You may administer anyone of the following: 5 papaya enzyme pills (the enzyme in the pill breaks down the wool and helps the wool pass through the digestive tract). These pills are found in the vitamin section of the pharmacy or a health food store. You can also administer a tablespoon of fur ball remedy for cats (such as Laxatone), or a fresh pineapple (pineapples also contain the necessary enzyme). If the blockage is large, you may have to continue treatment over several days. After the rabbit passes the blockage, gradually add its pelleted food a little each day. Continue to give handfuls of hay daily.

How can I prevent wool block?

Keeping your rabbit in good condition with no loose, over ripe wool will help him ingest as little wool as possible when he is grooming himself. Many Angora rabbit owners give papaya/pineapple enzyme to their rabbits once a week. Also giving a handful of timothy hay, orchard grass hay or straw daily helps prevent wool block.

Breeds of Angora Rabbits

There are four recognized breeds of Angora rabbits: English, French, Satin & Giant. The breeder from whom you purchased your rabbit should provide you with information about the Angora. If you are a first time buyer of Angoras you will want to ask for a pedigree (if you are using it strictly for wool you may not receive a pedigree, however if you plan on breeding, obtain a pedigreed Angora to ensure the breeding is compatible).

HELPFUL HINTS

- To remove wool build up on your rabbit's cage, use a propane torch. Be sure to remove your rabbit first and keep water handy. You can also use a long-handled bathroom brush to scrub the wool off the wire.
- Calcium present in the urine may build up on the wire where your rabbit urinates. A vinegar solution and a wire brush help dissolve and remove this buildup.
- If your rabbit develops static while being groomed, rub your hands or your rabbit with a fabric softener sheet (be sure it is unscented).
- Your rabbit needs to gnaw to prevent his teeth from growing too long. You can give him a block of hard wood or apple tree branch to chew (not plywood which contains formaldehyde).
- Be consistent with your rabbit; he'll know what to expect.
- Don't allow young children to play with your rabbit without supervision.
- Use your rabbit's dropping in your garden; your tomatoes will thank you.