



# The Clover Leaf

Newsletter of the Maryland/DC/NoVA Chapter of the House Rabbit Society. Serving Washington, D.C., Maryland and Northern Virginia

Dedicated to the memory of Clover, our Chapter founder

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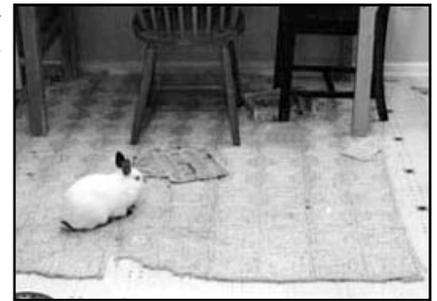
## Sharing Space with a Bunny by Liz Huffman

I went from sharing my home with one very small dwarf bunny to having my house renovated by four furry Bob Vilas within six months. Kitchen tiles were mysteriously rearranged in the night. The wall trim was stripped of paint and laboriously rounded off. The legs of my kitchen table were treated similarly. Even my sofas sported carefully placed holes. I was in despair. As my house continued to deteriorate, my husband pointed out, "Well, look at it this way. The house looks nice for a barn."

A barn. That's when it hit me—my house is a place where animals live. It is not going to look like Martha Stewart's house (and really, is that a bad thing?). I had to stop thinking about "bunny-proofing" my house. "Bunny-proof" sounded like an attempt to stop my rabbits from affecting my house. I wanted rabbits in my house and in my life. The idea, I realized, was not to make my house impervious to rabbits, but to make it safe for them—to "bunny-safe" my house.

"Bunny-safing" a house happens from the ground up. Start on the floor. Really, get down on the floor and look around. What's under your nose? Wood floors good for chewing and scratching? Long tasty carpet fibers? From a bunny-proofing perspective, the wood floors may be ruined. But, from a bunny-safe perspective, those carpet fibers are ten times as dangerous. Many rabbits take joy in plucking the fibers from your carpet and, unfortunately, a lot of those fibers could be ingested. Watch your bunny—is he a plucker? Do you find the fibers, or do they just disappear? You may decide to cover parts of your carpet with wood or carpet remnants, or to just let your rabbit run around only when you can watch her. You may decide to dispense with the carpet entirely and install something else. Rice and maize mats, found in stores like Pier One and IKEA, also provide a safe, inexpensive alternative for digging and chewing. The main goal is to keep Bunny from making a meal of something that could result in a GI stasis.

Raise your head a little higher. What catches your eye? Luscious house plants? Are they toxic? Do you know? Check with HRS educators, your vet or the local library. Keep them high out of reach. What about electric cords? Can you see them? If you can see them, they can be chewed by a rabbit. Tubing to encase the cords can be found at hardware stores or Radio Shack, or wires can be tucked behind or under furniture. Although the chance is slim that a rabbit will bite on a phone cord at the wrong instant (while it's ringing) and receive a shock, having a disconnected phone is inconvenient and even unsafe.



Jenny Huffman enjoys her rice mats

Examine your walls. How old is your house? Could the paint on the walls be lead-based? Rabbits need paint in their diet as much as they need carpet fibers. Nailing strips of untreated, unfinished wood along the baseboards gives your rabbits something to work on. Furniture is a bit trickier. If you want a piece of furniture to remain unscathed, remove it from the rabbit rooms. I had to relocate a rocking chair I loved because not only were the legs irresistible as an after-dinner snack but I was scared to death of rocking back onto a bunny. Wooden legs that are already round seem to be less of a chewing temptation. Sofas can be covered with plastic, old blankets or big cotton throw rugs to keep your rabbit from adding "cushion stuffing" to their breakfast.

In all of this, you have to be aware of who your bunny is. Is she young and not spayed or neutered? Better not let her out unsupervised then because she is wild with energy and hormones and likely to get into all kinds of trouble. Is he a confirmed digger? You may need to provide him with some cardboard boxes he can vent his enthusiasm on. Is she a tiny dwarf? Pay even closer attention to the gaps under furniture and behind appliances before she finds her way into them.

Talking to other rabbit owners and visiting their homes is a wonderful way to learn new ways of keeping your rabbits safe. When I'm rabbit-sitting, I take a good look at how the bunny owners have set up their rabbits' environment and I take some ideas home with me. The main idea I carry with me as I walk through my house is that I am not bunny-proofing. I have the feeling that could only be accomplished in a concrete bunker with wrought-iron furniture. I am doing my best to make my house bunny-safe and bunny-friendly for my rabbits because it's their home too. ♡