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Don't "Release" Your Bunny: You're not setting them free, you're sentencing them to an early death.

This bunny can live without your care



This one can't



A cottontail standing in grass on the left with the caption, "This bunny can live without your care," and a gray lop bunny sitting on a couch on the right with the caption, "This one can't."

"I couldn't keep my bunny anymore, so I set them free." We've heard far too many variations of this sentence. Sadly, it's a common misconception that, like their wild cousins, a pet bunny will be able to fend for itself. But just like there are huge differences between poodles and wolves, there are stark differences between domestic and wild rabbits that make it almost impossible for them to survive on their own. In reality, when you let a bunny go, you're not setting them free, you're sentencing them to an early death.

Pet Bunnies Make Easy Prey

Domestic bunnies are more eye-catching, less fearful, and slower than their wild cousins. Wild rabbits, like cottontails, have a dull brown, dual-pigmented fur color called "agouti" that helps them blend into their surroundings. Some domestic buns are agouti colored, but many more have been bred for beautiful, striking fur patterns and colors. Orange and black stripes (harlequin) or black and white patches make pet bunnies super cute but won't do them any favors when they're huddling in the bushes, hoping a fox doesn't spy them.

Wild agouti rabbit



Colorful pet bunnies



A wild agouti rabbit blending into its surroundings versus a domestic orange multi-colored rabbit, a dutch rabbit, an albino rabbit, and a black tort bunny.

The [centuries-long](#) domestication process hasn't just given pet bunnies pretty coats, it's actually changed their brain structure. Domestic bunnies' amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for [processing fear and detecting threats](#), is [smaller](#) than wild rabbits', and their medial prefrontal cortex, which helps control the response to fear, is larger. In other words, if there's a dog nearby, a wild rabbit would be more likely to notice the danger and run. Depending on the bunny, a domestic bun might not even consider the dog a threat until it was too late. Many of the bunnies at our rescue are even comfortable around dogs.

Most pet bunnies are also [slower](#) than wild rabbits. Depending on the breed, some domestic buns can reach speeds up to 35 mph, but most won't have developed the muscle to reach high speeds, especially if they've been cooped up in a hutch or cage. Even in the best shape, breeds that have been bred to be stockier and heavier wouldn't be able to reach these speeds. But wild rabbits have been practicing escaping predators their whole lives.

At the rescue, we've seen the sad reality of how easy a dumped pet bunny becomes prey first-hand. We've had several severely injured bunnies brought to us after they were attacked by dogs. One neighborhood where we were trying to save a feral-domestic rabbit colony was literally strewn with [dead rabbit body parts](#) because the poor things couldn't evade predators.

Dumped Pet Bunnies Are at Risk of Parasites and Diseases

In addition to predators, bunnies on their own also have to deal with parasites and diseases. Flies can lay their eggs on a bunny's dirty bottom, leading to a painful death by [flystrike](#). [Botflies](#) purposely seek out bunnies to lay their eggs on, which can also cause death, or at least a LOT of pain. Ticks, fleas, and mites can also infect a dumped bunny, which will cause health issues without their human around to remove the pests.

Dumped bunnies are also susceptible to diseases. [RHDV2](#) is an extremely infectious disease with a death rate anywhere between 5 and 80 percent. Stray domestic bunnies are at much higher risk of catching RHDV2 than a house bunny because they can come in contact with the bodily fluids or carcass of an infected wild rabbit or can have the virus carried to them by insects. An entire feral-domestic rabbit colony was even [wiped out](#) by this disease.

Without a clean water bowl around, bunnies can also get bacterial infections from drinking dirty, still water. Many feral-domestic buns we take in are sick with respiratory infections, which can quickly become chronic.

Domestic Bunnies are Sensitive to Extreme Weather

Pet buns also struggle with extreme weather conditions, especially heat. Temperatures as low as [80°](#) can put bunnies at risk of heatstroke, especially if they don't have any water to keep themselves cool. Rabbits tend to fare better against cold weather, but without shelter, warm straw to burrow into, or friends to snuggle with, your pet will be susceptible to [cold and hypothermia](#).

In the Best Case, Dumping Your Pet Bunny Will Hugely Reduce Their Life Expectancy

Even if your pet bunny managed to survive as long as a wild rabbit, it would still shorten their life by a *lot*. If housed indoors, fed a proper diet, and given veterinary care,

the average rabbit will live around [8-14 years](#). The average cottontail lives [just over a year](#), usually succumbing to a predator. If you dumped your bunny at age one, and they somehow managed to survive as long as a wild rabbit, this would reduce their life expectancy by [almost 90 percent](#).

In situations like this, if two or more rabbits are dumped together, they can start a feral colony. Ever heard the saying "multiply like rabbits?" Sadly, it's very true. At only three and a half months, bunnies can begin breeding and can have [one litter every month](#)! Even if the dumped bunnies only live a short while, they can easily create a whole fluffle of buns. These baby bunnies will then be born into terrifying lives full of predators, parasites, and danger, and will be lucky to even survive a year.

So What Should You Do if You Can't Keep Your Bunny Anymore?

Try rehoming them to new pet parents

If you're able to, rehoming your bunny to a new caregiver can be one of the best things you can do for your pet. They won't live a terrifying short life on their own in the wild, won't risk euthanasia at the pound, and won't have to deal with the stress of a crowded rabbit rescue. In addition to Craigslist, there are moderated rabbit Facebook groups that allow re-homing and often have rabbit-savvy members. Always set a rehoming fee, interview the new family, and ask for photos of their set-up, because sadly, many rabbits given away for free become food.

If you can afford it, spaying or neutering your bunny will make it easier for your bun to find a new home. If you're not able to get this done, we recommend encouraging your bun's new family to get the bunny spayed/neutered by offering to refund the rehoming fee upon proof of the procedure.

Surrender to a rescue

Surrendering to a rabbit rescue is the next best thing to rehoming your bun yourself. With the exception of terminally ill pets in a lot of pain, rabbit rescues won't euthanize, will get your bun spayed/neutered, and will only adopt out to screened pet parents. Sadly, many rabbit rescues are overcrowded and don't have room for more bunnies, so finding a rescue that can accept your bunny can be difficult.

Surrender to a Humane Society

Humane societies and no-kill shelters are generally less specialized in rabbits than rescues are, and can charge high surrender fees, but it's certainly a better situation for your bun than being dumped outside to die. If you can't rehome your bunny yourself or surrender to a rescue, then a Humane Society is the next best thing. They typically have euthanasia rates [below 90 percent](#) and will get the bunny spayed/neutered before adopting out.

Surrender to a shelter

If none of the above options work, then surrendering to a shelter is the last resort. Many shelters have high euthanasia rates because they just have too many animals coming in and not enough getting adopted. Many also don't spay/neuter rabbits before letting new pet parents take them home. But going to a shelter definitely gives your bunny a better chance of living the long, happy life they deserve than being dumped outside does.

If you can no longer take care of your bunny, do what's best for them and take the time to find them a new home or surrender them to a reputable rescue or humane society. Dumping a pet bunny outside is a death sentence, and your sweet little fluffball deserves every chance at a hoppy life in a loving home.

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