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The Place Where Animal Lovers Come Together | Fall 2008

**Featured Story**

Purina Mills® feeds have been wonderful for me. Good flesh and fur condition, so why would I change?"  
- Debbie Ernst, Purina® feeder

**THIS QUARTER'S**



rabbit tips:

Getting the Jump on Cold Weather Preparation



**Product Spotlight**

**Featured Story | How a Day at the Fair Turned into the Hobby of a Lifetime**



Even champion rabbit enthusiasts have to get their start somewhere. Debbie Ernst's introduction to the challenges and rewards of raising rabbits occurred at her local fairgrounds. "I saw rabbits being shown at the fair and it looked like a fun, competitive activity for me," she recalls. "Unlike raising cattle or pigs, I knew raising rabbits wouldn't cost a lot. Plus, I've always loved rabbits."

She embarked on her new hobby with 28 rabbits, a small shed, some outdoor hutches and high hopes. But she soon encountered an obstacle that would forever change the way she raised her rabbits.

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**Getting the Jump on Cold Weather Preparation**

*Can you believe it? Once again, winter is just around the bend. Take advantage of these beautiful autumn days to make preparations so that when Jack Frost makes an appearance, you'll know your rabbits have everything they need to stay healthy and happy.*



**Sound Management**

- Although a rabbit can eat more to help maintain body temperature, there are limits to how much food he can consume. That's why warm, dry housing is so crucial during cold winter months.
- Fall is a good time of year to check for leaks in the roof of the hutch. Your hutch should have solid walls on at least three sides and a slanted overhanging roof that will allow rain and snow to run off.
- If you use tarps as windbreaks, repair or replace any tears or missing grommets.
- The more a rabbit eats, the more water it needs. Because water is so important, check your rabbit's water source several times a day in cold weather to make sure it is clean and unfrozen.
- Glass water bottles can freeze and break, so autumn is a good time to transition to plastic or metal containers. (Changing your waterer now is far easier than changing bedding from a burst water bottle on a cold, snowy night.)
- If you opt for a heated waterer, clean it regularly to inhibit bacterial growth so that the water will be appealing to the rabbit. Be sure to keep the electrical cord out of reach so bunny can't nibble.
- If you're breeding rabbits, keep in mind that fertility decreases as daylight decreases. To maintain breeding consistency, keep the amount of light constant for 14 hours a day. One solution is to hang a 36-watt fluorescent tube light about six feet above the rabbits for every 55 square feet of floor space.
- Baby rabbits are not equipped to tolerate the cold, so provide extra warmth if needed. If you supplement the heat, monitor the temperature of the nest daily. If the nest gets too hot, the doe may refuse to nurse the litter. (A little heat goes a long way in a small nest box.)

**Good Health**

- Straw or bedding in the hutch provides extra warmth on cold autumn nights, but only if it's clean and dry. Damp surroundings—whether from rain, snow, urine or a leaky water bottle—are an invitation to disaster. Dampness will contribute to chilling and immune stress that can easily progress to serious illness.
- Even in cold weather, rabbits need access to fresh air. Without good ventilation, they can be susceptible to respiratory diseases. An enclosed box inside a wire cage provides shelter against wind and rain while allowing for airflow.

**Good Nutrition**

- The colder it gets, the more calories rabbits must consume to stay warm—as much as three times normal. If your rabbit does not have access to adequate food, he will be hungry, cold, lose weight and get sick. He could even die of illness or hypothermia. One way to be sure your rabbit is getting adequate nutrition during cold weather months is to provide a complete feed such as Purina Mills® Rabbit Chow® Fibre3™.

By following the tips above, you can ensure a happy, healthy winter for your rabbits.

> [back to top](#)

**Get to Know Purina Mills® Rabbit Chow® Fibre3™**



- Corn-Free Diet created especially for the unique needs of rabbits
- High Fiber supports normal cecum health
- Plant Proteins and Oils for natural sources of amino acids and essential fatty acids
- Ideal Nutrient-to-Energy Ratio maintains body condition through all life stages
- Added Antioxidants Including Vitamin A and Vitamin E helps maintain overall health, immune system health and metabolic functions

> [back to top](#)

**Hobby of a Lifetime - continued**

"At first, I was feeding a locally produced feed," recalls the Lubbock, Texas native, "but I learned quickly that the true test of a feed is the health and growth of offspring. Many of my kits were being born dead or deformed."

Ernst immediately bought a textbook and started looking for answers. The book contained pictures of kits like hers and claimed the defects could be caused by both too much or too little Vitamin A. As she began her search for a reliable feed, one name kept coming up again and again in ads, in trade show booths at conventions and in conversations with other competitors: Purina Mills.

"They're good, all-around feeds. The nutrients are precisely balanced, not changed on a whim based on what ingredients are available that day, like my old locally produced feed," she says.

"With rabbits, digestive tract health is critical," Ernst continues. "Purina includes a lot of extras that other feeds don't. I'm a big believer in the role healthy bacteria plays—without it, rabbits can't survive. Purina includes Lactobacillus Acidophilus in most rabbit feeds. They also use vegetable oil and extra nutrients for flesh and coat condition. And their formulas are all natural. Purina Mills® feeds have been wonderful for me. Good flesh and fur condition, so why would I change?"

Why indeed, when you consider what Debbie Ernst has accomplished since she took up her hobby 15 years ago. She eventually moved outside the city limits where a 20-by-30-foot barn now houses her 80 English Lop rabbits, some of them national champions.

"I've won Best of Breed at three national conventions," Ernst says proudly. "Last year at ARBA in Grand Rapids (aka, the American Rabbit Breeders Association championships, which Debbie describes as the Westminster Dog Show of rabbits), out of 400 English Lops, I had four in the top 12. When they whittled it down to the top four, three



of them were mine. Of the top two, both were mine. Their coats were just wonderful, just perfect."

She feeds a mix of Purina Mills® Advanced Nutrition Show Formula, Rabbit Chow® Complete Blend and Rabbit Chow® Fibre 3™ to keep her animals in prime condition year 'round. She believes she's helped convert nearly every rabbit breeder in Lubbock to Purina Mills. She's even traveled to Purina's LongView Animal Nutrition Center near St. Louis to learn more about how the feeds are formulated and produced.

"First and foremost, you have to buy feed from someone you trust," Ernst insists. "The very same products I use are fed to the rabbits there at LongView. I find that very reassuring. It makes me feel good to know that I've found a dependable feed, and that my rabbits are going to do well on the show tables."

Speaking of show tables, the national ARBA show is fast approaching. When asked about her prospects in Louisville, Ernst smiles but won't divulge much. "Let me just say, I think I will do well."

> [back to top](#)