Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Pack 12, Item 7

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Date

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**A nest box for your baby rabbits**

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Information on this topic was requested by DCFRN participants in Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Lesotho, Malta, Nigeria, Paraguay, St. Lucia,Tanzania, and Thailand.

Presenter: Barbara Peacock

**Special note**

Before using the information in this item, please read the notes at the end concerning related DCFRN items.

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a world-wide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, Massey Ferguson, and the University of Guelph.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to increase food supplies for your family, or to sell—ways that other farmers have used successfully.

Here's Barbara Peacock with more information today about rabbits.

**PEACOCK:** If you keep rabbits in cages, there's something youshould do before your female rabbit, or doe, gives birth to her young.

First of all, you should know when she will be giving birth—this will be about 30 days after she mated with a male rabbit, or buck. It's good to note the date she was mated, and then count 30 days from that date, so you will know when to expect her young to be born.

Now the doe needs a special place within her cage for a nest where she can give birth. This is something you can provide so the baby rabbits won't be born on the floor of the cage, where their little legs could go through the holes or spaces and be injured. The nest will also be a warm dry place for them when they're young.

So about a week before your doe is due to give birth, give her a "nest box"—a special box where she can make a nest.

It's easy to make a nest box for your doe. You can use wood or bamboo—or even a basket! Make the nest box so it's easy to clean, and so there are no rough splinters, sharp edges or nails that could hurt the little rabbits.

The box should be big enough for the mother and all her little ones, so they can move around comfortably in it. A good size for it would be about 45 centimetres (1-1/2 feet) long and 30 centimetres (1 foot) wide. The sides could be up to 30 centimetres (12 inches) high.

So that the doe can get in and out of the nest easily, make one of the sides lower than the rest, only about 10 to 15 centimetres (4 to 6 inches) high. This way the young rabbits can't crawl or fall out of the nest box when they're very small, but they will be able to hop in and out later when they're a little bigger.

It's often better not to cover the top of the box, so it won't get too hot and damp (moist) inside. Baby rabbits can get sick and die if the nest is damp. For this reason, there should be several holes in the bottom of the nest box, so that urine from the rabbits can drain out. That's very important—the nest box must stay dry.

Now, before you put the nest box into the cage, make sure it's clean. A dirty nest box can make the rabbits sick. If the nest box has been used before, wash it well with soapy water, then rinse with boiling water and leave it out in the sun for a few days—or you could use a disinfectant to clean it.

Put the clean nest box into the doe's cage about a week before she will give birth. Put some dry grass into it—clean, soft, dry grass for bedding. About a day before she gives birth, the doe herself may add some grass from her feed, and when the young are born, she will pull some fur from her body and mix it with the dry grass to make a soft nest for her babies.

After about two weeks in the nest box, the little rabbits will start to hop in and out of it. When they are about three weeks old, they no longer need the nest, so take it out of the cage. If the floor is made of wire mesh or if spaces between the slats are so big that it's difficult for the young rabbits to move around easily, put a smooth board on the floor in a corner of the cage. They can then sit on it to rest comfortably.

After you've removed the nest box from the cage, wash it well, and keep it in a clean place until the next time you need it.

One final hint:

A mother rabbit may be quite nervous around the time she's due to give birth, and especially afterwards, when she has young babies. She'll be easily frightened; and when she's frightened she may jump into her nest box, stamp on her babies with her feet, and injure or even kill them. So be extra careful not to make loud noises arounda mother with young rabbits, and to keep away dogs or other animals that might frighten her.

Serving Agriculture, the Basic Industry, this is Barbara Peacock.

**Notes**

You may wish to use this information in association with other DCFRN items:

A Good Home for Your Rabbit - DCFRN Package 12 (this Package), Item 6

If You Eat Meat, Rabbit Meat May Save You Money – DCFRN Package 1, Item 2

**Information sources**

1. Backyard Rabbit Farming in the Tropics - Agrodok 20 (68 pages), published by Agromisa, P.O. Box 41, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands. <http://www.agromisa.org/wp-content/uploads/Agrodok-20-Back-yard-rabbit-keeping-in-the-tropics-1.pdf>