

Expert's Corner – Rabbits

By Taylor Barnes

When I was 7 years old, I was given the sweetest, gentlest rabbit, Thumper. A couple of years later, a family who had been showing rabbits in 4-H joined our horse group. They introduced me to a rabbit and poultry 4-H group, where I found the best teacher and learned a majority of what I know about rabbits. Showing rabbits was fun and full of friends, plus there were more shows than I realized. In Thumper's elderly years, she may not have been in her prime - overweight, with a bad hair coat and blind in one eye - but she was so gentle that it made showmanship very easy for me, even at the State level. I now have very nice pedigreed rabbits that show well on the table against others, but Thumper gave me the appreciation for rabbits that I have today.

One of the most important things I have learned in the years of showing is to start with a gentle rabbit you enjoy working with. It is important to get them used to being handled and sitting quietly for a length of time. Touch them everywhere. Look at the eyes, ears, nose, and teeth. Work on turning them over to examine their underside. The most beautiful rabbit will not show well if it cannot be examined. It is best to get a purebred rabbit rather than a mixed breed, since they will be judged against a breed's standard. But it is certainly not necessary to get an expensive pedigreed rabbit to show in 4-H! Start with a docile rabbit, then practice and show for a while to decide if you like it before investing too much. If it is something you find fun and want to spend more time with, there are many wonderful rabbits to choose from, or you may want to begin your own breeding program to create the next champion!



The rabbit showmanship speech is very detailed and more challenging than some other species shown in 4-H. Learning to give this speech in front of a judge and spectators has greatly increased my public speaking ability and confidence. I have gained a great knowledge of rabbits, including the history and background of different breeds, their care and nutrition, and conformation faults, and this has helped me understand and appreciate how the rabbits are judged against others of their breed or class. Continually striving for ideal weight, excellent coat condition, and proper grooming has taught me responsibility for my rabbits' care.

If you are interested in showing rabbits, but are not sure where to begin, attend a rabbit show to see what is involved, meet experienced people and learn what you need to do to prepare. The County Extension office is also a great place to start as they can give you contact information for a club or someone nearby that can mentor you as you begin, as well as educational material and alerts to upcoming rabbit clinics.

Good luck and I hope to see you at a 4-H Rabbit Show soon!



**"Best Dressed
Bunny"**

