

# Help... I Found a Baby Bunny!

What You Should Know!

## Rabbit Nest Description

Wild cottontail rabbits "nest" in shallow holes dug in the ground by the mother rabbit. Nests are often found in people's lawns, gardens or shrubs. The mother rabbit lines the shallow hole with fur pulled from her body and covers it and her babies with a mixture of dry grass and twigs to hide it from predators.



## How A Mother Rabbit Feeds Her Babies

The mother rabbit feeds her babies 2 to 3 times a day. Once before early morning (dawn) and a couple of times right after it gets dark (dusk). She squats over the top of the nest so the babies can reach up and nurse her milk.

The mother rabbit does NOT continually sit on the nest or stay with the baby bunnies. Doing so would signal carnivorous (meat eating) birds and animals (like owls and fox) as to where her babies are living. By staying away from the nest, it protects them.

## Problems for Rabbits

Because many rabbits nest in yards, they are likely to get run over with lawnmowers, struck by weedwhackers or caught by pet dogs and cats.

## What To Do If a Nest is Disturbed

If a nest of baby rabbits is accidentally uncovered by a lawnmower, rake, shovel, or weedwhacker, carefully check to make sure the bunnies are not hurt, cut, or bleeding. If they are NOT hurt, put them back in the nest and cover them up. When putting bunnies back in the nest (especially older ones), they will "pop" up trying to hop. This is normal.

Place two long thin twigs or two pieces of string in an "X" across the top of the nest. Check the nest AFTER the mother has had time to feed them (usually the next day). If the "X" is moved, the mother has uncovered the nest to feed her babies. Now just leave them alone. This may mean mowing around a small patch in the yard for a short time.



If the "X" is NOT moved, then carefully uncover the nest and feel the babies to see if they are warm. If they are still okay, check again after the next feeding time. Be aware that sometimes the babies nurse by pushing straight up through the nest covering and therefore do not disturb the string. The real test is the body temperature and activity of the babies. If they are cold and limp, then they need to be rescued. Remove the babies from the nest. Keep them in a small, dark, covered box with holes punched in the lid. Warm the bunnies by positioning a heating pad, set on LOW, under HALF the box. Other ways to warm the babies are to fill a ziplock bag or rubber glove with warm water and place it in the box, or microwave a dish towel for 25 seconds (only warm enough that you can place the towel over your face) and use that. Do NOT put fresh green grass in the box because the moisture in it will chill them. You may line the box with paper towels. DoNOT pet or handle the bunnies because they stress easily. They may look calm but they are actually just very scared. Do NOT feed the bunnies anything including any kind of milk, water, honey, eggs or homemade formula because their stomachs will not tolerate it. Call a Wildlife Rehabilitator for help as soon as possible.

### What to Do for Bunnies That Are Attacked by Pets

If the bunnies are caught by a cat or dog and have been bitten, put them in the warm, dark box (see instructions above) and call a Wildlife Rehabilitator for help. Cats have bacteria (germs) in their mouths that will cause a rabbit to die, usually within 3 days, if left untreated.

### Determining Which Bunnies Should Be In The Nest

Bunnies that are pink with little or no fur, with closed eyes, and with ears still flat to their bodies should still be in the nest. Baby rabbits stay in the nest for about 4 weeks. They leave the nest when they are about 4" or 5" long and the white diamond shaped patch of fur on their forehead is almost gone. They will also have fluffy fur, their eyes will be open and their ears will stand up away from their bodies. They will look like tiny adults and are supposed to be on their own without their mother. Leave these bunnies alone unless they are injured.



### Touching Baby Bunnies/Misconception

Touching baby bunnies will NOT make the mother abandon (leave) them. This is a common misconception people mistakenly have.

Bunnies that look like the photo to the right are out of the nest. Their eyes are open, their ears are up and their fur is fluffy. They are about the size of your fist and able to jump quickly.

