

Inked Rabbits

Rabbits are tattooed for many reasons, but it all comes down to identification. You'll want to tell your rabbits apart (after a while all black rabbits look the same and if you ever get cages mixed up you've got a mess). You'll want to keep accurate records for medical or breeding purposes (pedigrees are important - even in wool rabbits). You may want to enter your rabbits in a show, in which case they must be tattooed, or sell them. You may have a rabbit that escapes and ends up in a shelter, a natural disaster, or rabbits stolen; when you have a tattoo you know and can prove that that is indeed your rabbit. No matter what your purpose for having rabbits is, tattoos are beneficial.

Rabbits are tattooed in the ears. This makes it easy to see except for the English Angora, in which case it just takes a little bit of work to part the wool enough. The Ear Number is the number tattooed in the rabbit's left ear and is only to contain numerals 0-9 and letters A-Z. No special characters, shapes, or smiley faces are allowed. If the rabbit is to be shown, ARBA also requires nothing of a profane or sexual nature be tattooed. There are some breeders who want a rabbit to only be used for meat or breeding and will tattoo things like, "meat", "cull", "no show", etc. This does not however prevent the rabbit from being shown. If you truly do not want the rabbit shown, a smiley face, exclamation point, star, etc in the ear is a disqualification and prevents them from being shown. These characters can still be written on a pedigree however, so you can still keep track of your rabbits if they have them in the ear. . Rabbit tattoos are quick, easy, and there's no reason to skip the tattoo, even if you don't own a tattoo kit.

The first step in having your rabbits tattooed is deciding on a system. You can simply tattoo a rabbit's name or the first few letters of the name. That works great as long as you don't have several with the same initial letters; choose 5 characters, it's surprisingly easy to duplicate 3 and 4 letter sequences. You can also choose a system like the ones below that breeders commonly use. A good system should tell you who a rabbit is, where it's from (the farm), and may have the option of telling you who the parent's are, who litter mates are, and more.

KS94

K = farm name

S = rabbit breed or rabbit initial

94 = Rabbit # born in the barn

So KS94 could be the 94th Silver Fox born at Kaninchen Farm or it could be the 94th rabbit out of a rabbit named Sweety Pie, at Kaninchen Farm.

4B7

4 = Buck's number

B = Farm name

7 = Doe's number or kit number

JX92

J = Farm name

X = Dam or Sire's letter

9 = litter number

2 = kit number in litter

There are three ways to tattoo a rabbit. No matter which way you choose, having an old bath towel on hand to wrap the rabbit in to help hold them and keep them calm is a must. The first way to get your rabbit a tattooed is to simply take the rabbit to a rabbit show and ask a breeder. There's usually always someone there with a pen who would happily do it for \$2-5. This is a quick, cost effective method for the person with only one or two rabbits.

If you have several rabbits or will be breeding, consider purchasing a tattoo kit yourself. There are two styles - the clamp, and the pen. Clamps used to be the most common way that people would tattoo their rabbits. You purchase a clamp and a set of letters. You load the letters onto the pliers, clamp them down firmly on a rabbit's ear, and then rub ink into the holes with a small brush. This method is quick, dirty (ink will smear in the ears for a few days), and doesn't allow for duplicate letters unless you purchase multiple sets for additional letters. If you do not clamp hard enough, the letters won't show up later. If you clamp too hard, you can puncture the ear or create permanent divots/bumps.

The tattoo pen is rapidly gaining in popularity with breeders for the freedom it provides. With a clamp you must take the time to swap out letters between rabbits, but with a pen, you just dip it in more ink and carry on seamlessly. The pen allows you to write anything you want for the tattoo or draw special characters which will make the rabbit unshowable. Set up with a pen takes approximately the same time as with a clamp, but the time/work between rabbits is much faster. However, it does take more time to hold the ear still and tattoo vs just a quick clamp on. Pens do require replacement needles after a few dozen tattoos, but they are cheap and last for a long time - we've gone through 3 in 6 years.

What's in My Tattoo Kit

Collecting items for tattooing your rabbits can be easy or difficult; it can cost a little or it can cost a lot. Here's how we did it.

The Box - We bought a cheap little toolbox off of eBay but a craft box, or tackle box from Walmart would have worked too. You can find them at your local stores and save on shipping. You'll want a tray for small things and a deep bottom. The tray is where most of our things live, but a few larger items are on the bottom.

The Ink And Accessories - You don't have to use special rabbit ink; it's the same as human tattoo ink. You can tattoo your rabbits in any color that you'd like, but black and green seem to be the most common. The main thing is that it needs to be easy to read - both now and in the future. Green gets hard to read after a while. We use Scream Tattoo black ink. It's about \$10 per bottle and we haven't run out yet.

We use an ink stand. It costs between \$4 and \$5 on eBay (search "Tattoo Ink Cup Holder") and it's been worth every penny. The little cups are \$5 on eBay for 100 of them.

Prep Supplies - Alcohol Swabs, Sharpie, Bunny Balm.

We use rubbing alcohol (or alcohol swabs), to clean the ear before and after. We also use Bunny Balm on the tattoo after we have finished. We don't keep it in the kit, but we wrap the rabbits in a towel when we tattoo.

The Needles - 3 Liner, or 5 Round Shader or 7 Round Shader needle, Cleaning Brushes

You don't have to pay \$5 per needle for a fresh one from the cage company. You can buy them off of the internet for really cheap. You'll want to stick with a #10 (0.30mm) or a #12 (0.35mm) for the needle size. You will be looking for a Round Liner (RL) or a Round Shader (RS). Just buy the ones for humans and use a pair of wire cutters to cut off the extra length to fit your tattoo pen.

The Tattoo Pen - We use a Equitat2 tattoo pen for our rabbits. We had previously used the KBTatts pen, and it died after a few months. All of the tattoo pens out there look basically like electric toothbrushes with a modified head. You might could try tinkering with one of those. You can also buy a makeup tattoo machine from eBay for around \$20.

The Medicine Kit

Disinfectants

- Rubbing Alcohol
- Peroxide
- Iodine
- Disinfecting Wipes

Topical Supplies

- Neosporin or Triple Antibiotic Cream
- Gauze squares of varying sizes
- Medical tape (the clear plastic kind not the white paper tape kind)
- Vet Wrap

Oral Supplies

- Syringes (marked oral use only - not sterile)
- Kitten bottle (optional)

Injection Supplies

- 1mL or 3mL syringes
- 22G needles
- Sharps container

Medications

- Penicillin G Procaine
- Neosporin or Triple Antibiotic Ointment
- Ivermectin Horse Paste (Apple Flavor)
- Infant Gas Drops
- Tums
- Papayin or Bromelin tablets (for Angoras)
- Probiotics
- Electrolytes

Miscellaneous Supplies

- Accurate, easy to use scale
- Tongue Depressor or popsicle sticks
- Tweezers
- Sharp scissors (think nail scissors, hair scissors, or surgical scissors)
- Surgical Kit
- Records
- Pen
- Sharpie

Calculating Medicine Dosages

This is not a substitute for veterinary advice, but this is how we treat our rabbits based off of information readily available.

Administering medicine to your rabbits can be intimidating at first, but with some basic science and math skills, you can do it confidently. Let's get started with some common units and abbreviations.

Liquid Units

IU = International Units

mL = milliliter

cc = cubic centimeter 1 cc = 1 mL

Units of Weight (Mass)

g = grams

kg = kilograms

lbs = pounds 1 lb = 0.453592 kg 1 lb = 16 oz

oz = ounces

Why doesn't my medication bottle say IU instead of 5mL like for children's medicine?

There's a couple of reasons for this - 1) most medicines are not tested/approved for use in rabbits specifically, so they won't have rabbit specific dosage (it's simply not cost effective to go through the approval process for rabbits). 2) Livestock medications come in different strengths or concentrations.

When you read your medication bottle, you'll see something about it's concentration. That's why we use IU in a lot of dosage calculations because medicines can be different strengths. We'll be using a bottle of Penicillin G Procaine for our example. It says on it 300,000 IU per mL. That means that for every 1 mL you take, you're getting 300,000 IU. A bottle of a different brand may say 100,000 IU per mL or something completely different.

$$\frac{300,000 \text{ IU}}{1 \text{ mL}} \quad \text{or} \quad \frac{1 \text{ mL}}{300,000 \text{ IU}}$$

How to Write a Concentration

Common rabbit dosages for various medications are available online. Simply google "Rabbit dosage Penicillin G Procaine", and you'll get several good links in the top 5 search results. We like Medirabbit and Wabbitwiki. Both give reliable, comprehensive lists of rabbit medications, as does the Merck Veterinary Manual. Generally they agree that it's 40,000 IU/kg to 60,000 IU/kg every 1-2 days. They abbreviate this differently.

Timing Abbreviations

sid = once a day

bid = twice a day

q = every h = hours q12h = every 12 hours

Location Abbreviations

SC or SQ = Subcutaneous = under the skin

IM = Intramuscular = into the muscle

PO = Orally = ate or drank

8 lbs 5 oz ~~X~~ 8.5 lbs NO!

Ounces / 16 = decimal of lbs

8 lbs 5 oz = 8.31 lbs ✓ Yes!

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 oz = 0.06 lbs | 9 oz = 0.56 lbs |
| 2 oz = 0.13 lbs | 10 oz = 0.63 lbs |
| 3 oz = 0.19 lbs | 11 oz = 0.69 lbs |
| 4 oz = 0.25 lbs | 12 oz = 0.75 lbs |
| 5 oz = 0.31 lbs | 13 oz = 0.81 lbs |
| 6 oz = 0.38 lbs | 14 oz = 0.88 lbs |
| 7 oz = 0.44 lbs | 15 oz = 0.94 lbs |
| 8 oz = 0.5 lbs | |

Since we're talking about penicillin here, I'm going to add the warning that you never give Pen G by mouth (it's too toxic), and you should not inject it intramuscularly (IM) at home. Now, back to calculating your dosage. Break out the scale here since you need an accurate current weight on the rabbit. What the rabbit weighed at last check doesn't matter, you need to know now because you're administering medication now, and the amount is important for proper effectiveness. For example, Peaches weighed 9 lbs 4.5 ounces 4 days ago. Due to her infections, she now weighs 8 lbs 8.5 ounces. In just 4 days her weight has changed enough to change the medication dose needed. You will need to know the rabbit's weight in kilograms for most medications. To do this, you have to jump through some hoops - the first of which is turning the ounces into decimals of pounds.

The rabbit's weight today is 8.54 lbs or 3.87 kg. When we write the formula below, we insert the weight in kilograms. You know you've got the formula right when the units on top cancel out the units on the bottom and the remaining unit is the one you're looking for. For example, the IUs cancel out with the pink lines. The kilograms cancel out with the green lines, and the only unit leftover is mL, so I know that I have successfully converted the concentration and dose to the mLs I need to administer. The ending amount 0.52 mL is specific to this single rabbit. To customize it for your rabbit, simply enter your rabbit's weight instead of 3.87 kg (above where it says rabbit weight).

$$\frac{1 \text{ mL}}{300,000 \text{ IU}} \times \frac{40,000 \text{ IU}}{1 \text{ kg}} \times 3.87 \text{ kg} = 0.52 \text{ mL}$$

Concentration x Dose x Rabbit Weight = Amount to Give

Amount of Penicillin G Procaine to Give

This concentration x dose x rabbit weight formula works for any medication, not just Pen G. Simply read the bottle to get the concentration and insert it. Look up the rabbit dosage and insert that, and then add your rabbit weight.