



Flower Rabbits:

A guide to rabbit behaviors and personality for rescue and shelter workers.

Being prey animals, rabbits often exhibit markedly different behaviors in shelters than they do in permanent homes, making it difficult to predict what type of home might be best for a particular rabbit. The following five rabbit personalities and the behaviors that are likely to be observed in each was based on the results of a detailed questionnaire completed by shelter workers, fosterers, and people with rabbits in permanent homes. Our list is intended as a guide for interpreting shelter behaviors in rabbits and for assessing what kind of home might be best for rabbits exhibiting certain behaviors.

We suggest that the information on each rabbit in the shelter include a color-coded mark or sticker indicating the personality type to help shelter/rescue workers quickly see what adopter might be a good match. Remember, however, that the list is only a guide – our recommendations may hold true for most rabbits exhibiting the listed behaviors, but there may be exceptions. Always pay attention to your own intuition.



Violets

In shelters the primary behaviors that will be noticed are cowering, hiding, and thumping along with a little occasional exploring and startling. These are the shy rabbits.

In a permanent home Violets may still cower, hide, thump, and startle occasionally, but will usually blossom out to explore, groom, and present for pets. Violets usually do best in homes with adults only, but with a little nurturing can become gentle, sweet companions. They may get along well with other rabbits, but if the other rabbit is a Tulip, bullying could occur.



Bluebells

In the shelter environment hiding and cowering may still be observed at times, but there will also be additional behaviors such as exploring, grooming, playing, greeting, headshaking, thumping, and occasionally nipping and binkies.

In permanent homes Bluebells are often friendly interactive rabbits, but may be cage-protective and nip at a person reaching into their area. Some Bluebell rabbits are “explorer rabbits” in permanent homes – very active and usually gentle, but may not like to sit still for much cuddling. Bluebells often get along with other rabbits if properly introduced, and a few may be able to tolerate children if they are not over-handled. Bluebells may nip if they are restrained and fondled against their will.



Daisies

These rabbits explore, groom, present for pets, and may occasionally be seen to flop, binky, thump, or (rarely) hide in shelters. They particularly like to be stroked and will often present to a person for pets. They will almost never engage in antagonistic encounters with other rabbits unless provoked.

Behaviors will be essentially the same in the shelter and home environment. Daisies include the “creampuff” and “earth mother” bunnies, and are probably the best rabbit for the adopter seeking a rabbit who will tolerate sitting in a person’s lap and being petted. Daisies usually do well with other rabbits and people (including many children) because of their laid-back personalities.



Tulips

In shelters these are the rabbits that will be observed engaging in the widest range of behaviors – everything from bulging eyes, cowering, chinning, grooming, boxing, lunging, exploring, fighting, thumping, flagging their tails, startling, hiding, playing with toys, and binkying, although they will rarely flop in a shelter.

In permanent homes these are truly entertaining rabbits, always on high alert, very active and interactive, and exhibiting the same wide range of behaviors they do in shelters. Some Tulips may not do well with children or other rabbits; caution should be observed in adopting Tulips to homes with many other rabbits and/or children.



Roses

These royal rabbits have a mind of their own, and it is evident even in the shelter environment. They are often seen chinning, exploring, head bumping, and presenting for pets. Roses may also binky, head shake, and play with toys. A few may tail-flag or thump occasionally if they see someone or something they dislike. Hiding and cowering are almost never seen in these rabbits.

Roses demand a great deal of attention in permanent homes, and are not shy in making their demands known. A few of these rabbits may get along with other rabbits if the rabbits are submissive, but many Roses actively dislike other rabbits and may be difficult to bond to a rabbit companion, preferring human companions to do their bidding.