

Raising Dwarf Hotots
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The first time I heard about the "Bandit Bunny, I was at Frances Booth's Rabbitry (a 72 year young registrar). It was love at first sight. She had a doe that was to kindle soon and said I could buy one when they were ready. Meanwhile, I had gone to the mall, and saw a Dwarf Hotot in a pet shop. Being a relatively new rabbit breeder, I quickly snatched it up not thinking about a pedigree.

Frances called when the litter was old enough to wean. She gave me pick of the litter. I naturally chose a doe to go with my buck. I later purchased a pedigreed buck from Susan White and that was my start in 1988. I have bred, traded breedings and stock throughout the years to continually improve our breed.

The Dwarf Hotot has steadily improved over past years. There are more 2 ¼ - 2 ¾ pound rabbits than those 3 - 3 ½ . Occasionally, a doe will push the maximum weight limit. If she has a nice body, I will keep her for breeding. The larger does will normally have 5-7 kits while a smaller doe will have 2-4.

I have fostered several different species of rabbits to my Dwarf Hotot does including Netherland Dwarfs, Holland Lops and Florida Whites. Occasionally I will have a doe kindle 1-2 and another doe have 3-4 kits. Rather than a doe just raising one kit, I will foster it to another mother and re-breed the doe. This keeps the doe in production and enables you to increase your litters per season. It is impossible to tell the kits apart, so a small dot with my tattoo needle into the foster kits left ear, will insure proper identification later. The dot can be incorporated into the permanent tattoo later. When fostering kits from one doe to another, remember, rabbits can't count. If the kits are young and still in the nest box, rub the new kits over the other kits. This will give the same scent to the foster kit as the others. If I foster kits older in age (over 2 weeks), I will usually take the doe out of her cage for approximately 8-12 hours and add the foster kit. When you re-introduce the doe, two things, first she is full of milk and doesn't care who she nurses, and second, the foster kits smells just like her own.

Weaning: When weaning the litters remove the larger kits first at about 6-7 weeks old. This enables the smaller ones to nurse a week or so longer thereby insuring a good start to life. I keep the siblings together for 2-3 weeks. This can be a stressful time. My logic is if they still have siblings with them it eases the stress. After I see they are all eating and drinking fine, I will separate them. I full feed the youngsters until they are approximately 3 months old.

Culling: Some breeders cull at birth by removing any mis-marked kits. I can usually find homes for the dutch marked so they are allowed to stay. As they start popping out of the nest box, Start picking them up the ears, down the back and on the tail for black spots. Don't sell handling them short, they love the attention. Weaning time is the first culling. The kits with the black spots will normally be sold as pets unless they show promising qualities. At this age you can see spots in the eyes. Hold them up in bright light, but not bright enough that they close their eyes. Turn them so you can see the eye at different positions. You are looking for blue spots and marbling in the eye. I will use the exceptional culls with black spots for

breeding, keeping the best in the next litter and usually culling the carrier of the disqualification at a later time. This lets me keep that blood line continuing. The second culling is approximately 3 months of age. This is when I am very critical. First pose the rabbit as if in a show. Look down from above it's head. If you see it's nose, then chances are it's not going to have the curvature of skull we desire. Also look for width between the eyes down through the muzzle. Next look at them from a side profile. They must have a rise when posed. If, when I run my hand over their hindquarter and it's flat between the hips then it is culled. Secondly, I turn the rabbit and hold it upside down in the palm of my hand. The back feet should be straight. If the toes point out and the heels in, then chances are it will be pinched and/or undercut. Those are immediately culled. I have found it easier to breed out a narrow head than a bad body. Check their eyes again at this age. Occasionally eye spots are missed at the first culling but can be caught at this time. I will also double check their teeth at this age.

Eyebands: Our standard calls for eyebands the width of 2 pennies and they are allocated 15 points. Unless there is no eyeband or a break in the band, this is the very last part of the rabbit I look at. Notice the points allocated is 15. That is the same as their ears or the head.

Dwarf Hotots tend to need more fiber than other breeds. Give them plenty of Oat, Timothy or any grass hay. They love it and think they are getting a treat. Little do they know it is good for them. Don't give them Alfalfa as it is too rich.

The Dwarf Hotots have a unique personality. They love affection and attention. They are a very curious rabbit, especially the bucks. I encourage 4-H children to use bucks for showmanship as they are easy to handle and love the attention. The most important part of raising Dwarf Hotots is not to give up. Too many times, breeders buy a pair or trio and expect to have winners right off the bat. It doesn't happen that way. It takes time and patience. It is like any other breed, you may get one in the litter that looks great. The same breeding, you might have the whole litter showable or none at all. Don't give up! Patience is a virtue and eventually you will conquer.