

Cute bunny is a bad idea for an Easter present

At Easter, people are tempted, through impulse buying, to purchase that cute, fluffy bunny in the pet shop window.

Often these furry commodities are used as advertising tools in a variety of businesses. Children want such pets because they are portrayed as the spirit of Easter; parents may think of them as the ideal gift.

What many people don't realize is that a large percentage of these rabbits are returned to animal shelters or let loose in the wild to fend for themselves. Giving up these animals is often the direction taken once the responsibilities of care and treatment are realized. This typically occurs two months or more after obtaining the rabbit,

resulting in animal shelters being forced to care for these animals until, hopefully, good homes can be found for them. Finding good homes for these cute animals is a very difficult task.

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says rabbits often make poor pets as they are very stressful animals. Even a very gentle child could cause a rabbit to bite and/or kick, a naturally defensive reflex.

Rabbits normally do not like to be held or carried, and a rabbit's back is very delicate and is easily broken. For this reason it is advisable not to hold or carry a rabbit by its ears or by the skin around its neck. A small child should be supervised and taught how to

properly handle a bunny. Rabbits are not like dogs or cats and should not be expected to be. They can be playful and affectionate, but usually on their terms only.

If you still decide to buy a rabbit, do so because you are ready to take one into your home as a long-term pet, not as a pleasing gift.

Veterinarians strongly advise neutering (castrating/male, spaying/female) pet rabbits, and not just for obvious reasons. Once rabbits reach sexual maturity (at six months of age), males are prone to spray urine while marking their territory, while an alarming 80 per cent of unspayed females develop uterine cancer.

Another commonly exploited animal at Easter is the baby chick.

These chicks may seem cute and irresistible, but the reality of keeping a pet chicken may not be as

appealing. Animal shelters become havens for surrendered chicks once the animals mature.

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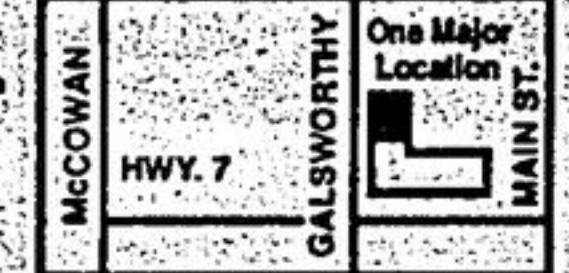
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