



Raising Backyard Meat Rabbits

Transcript – Module 4

Thank you for joining me for module four. And in this module, we're going to learn all about breeding your rabbits. We're going to learn things like how old does a rabbit have to be before they can do their first breeding. We're going to teach you how to breed to get the biggest litter. And then I'm gonna show you how to check the doe to see when she is in her most fertile state for breeding. We're also going to show you what a successful breeding looks like, and then we're gonna talk a little bit about what can go wrong. We're going to troubleshoot some things like what if the buck is just not into it? What if the doe totally refuses to mate? We've had that happen to us before and we know how to get past it. So, tune in and see our secret recipe for successful breeding of the doe when she's feeling stubborn. And then we're going to talk about how your climate is going to affect the way you breed your rabbits. Raising rabbits in the South and breeding them definitely has its challenges. So, you're gonna find out our strategy to getting a jump on the breeding season in the South and make you successful at that. So, join me as we jump back into the adventure of raising backyard rabbits.

Let's start with how old your buck and your doe need to be for you to breed them. For this medium to large breed, I would say six, between six and eight months is a good time to breed, minimum six months old. Rabbits are really interesting creatures in that the active mating releases the eggs and they come down. So really technically you can breed your doe at any time, but there are going to be times that she is more fertile than other times and you're going to have an easier time breeding her. So, let me show you how to check your doe for the most fertility.

This is Adeline. She is my favorite doe, but she's getting older. But she has about one, maybe one more breeding season left in her. She's about three years old, almost three years old. So, let me show you how to check. What you're gonna do is just make scissors fingers again, like I showed you when we checked the sex, and just press down and you're going to check to see if her vulva is pink or bright purple and dark in color and that's pretty good. But if it's a light pink and dry, then you need to wait another week and then check her again. And that is going to be ... the bright red color is going to be your best breeding time. Now you want to always take the doe to the buck's cage because she will defend her territory and she might hurt him if you put the buck in her cage. Now I use my exercise pens for breeding just because I prefer that sometimes the doe can get in the corner of the cage and just hunker down with her back to the corner and just, yeah, refuse to do anything else. So, I just prefer the exercise pens.

What you want to do is breed first thing in the morning and then it takes about eight hours for those eggs to come down stimulated by the act of mating. And so, you want to come back in the coolest evening and breed again and that is going to give you your largest litter size and then the buck should runt and fall over. And that tells you that it was a successful breeding and you need to really stay there and see that because you need to know that the breeding was successful and that way you can mark it on your calendar because you're going to have to wait 28 days. So, it's good to know, to have a good assurance at least that that was successful. When we were breeding our rabbits, you know, I told you that my son had a rabbit business, so we're breeding rabbits for the first time. It was pretty funny because a lot of the neighborhood kids just happened to come over that day, which they usually did. They came on in the fence and yeah, there we were breeding our rabbits. So, I'm sure there was quite a lot of talk at the dinner table that night. A lot of questions that they had for their parents. So, it was pretty funny. So you want to also breed both does that you have on the same day because if something happens with one of the moms, then you're going to want to foster the babies to another mom or

you know, maybe one's a first time mom, you know, we'll talk more about that in a minute but you want to do them both the same day. That way if anything happens, you have a little safety net there with the other doe being in milk.

Now sometimes your buck needs a little bit of help if the doe ... with the first mating of the doe. So, you can catch her and you can just hold her down, hold her head down and you can even just put your hand under her, tilt her up a little bit and you know till she gets the hang of it. And then you usually don't have any more problems after that. And then you want to keep good records. Write down who you mated to whom on your calendar. I have a special farming calendar for this. And then you want to count out 28 days and write on your calendar. Put nest box in so you can be all ready for those babies.

Now breeding usually goes well, but not always. You've heard the expression breed like rabbits. Well, I wish that were always true, but sometimes you do have problems and especially if you're needing to breed out of season like I am. Because of the heat of the summer, I need to breed in the cool weather going on into winter and through winter. So, let's talk about what could go wrong, kind of troubleshoot that for you so you can have a successful breeding if your rabbit. So, first of all, let's start with the buck. Sometimes the buck is just not interested. Now this hasn't happened to us very often. It only happened actually one time. My son had had this opportunity to get this champion buck. He wanted to show his rabbits and a friend of ours is really generous. He had bought this buck from up North and had it shipped down to him.

I think he paid like \$1,000 for this buck. He was really chocolate, beautiful color and he was gonna breed this rabbit, get some championships, show winners and we put the rabbit in with ... the buck in with our does and nothing; then nothing. He just wasn't into it at all, ever. So yeah, it can happen. One thing you can do is you can switch their cages so you can put the doe in the buck's cage and the buck in the doe's cage for overnight and then try again in the morning. That usually will have things work out. If not, if you ... if it just doesn't work out, sometimes your buck's just too fat and lazy and you need to start decreasing his food a little by a few tablespoons every day. Put him on a diet, make sure he gets out of his cage and get some good exercise.

But if you just absolutely, you don't have a buck that's ever interested in ... just not aggressive enough to get the job done, then of course, you know, that wouldn't be a good one for your breeding program. Now, what if the doe is just not interested? Now this is a lot more common for us. Now sometimes the buck can talk her into it. You can leave him in the cage or the pen together, but you need to stay there because she can turn on him and she can hurt him badly. She can even kill him. And so yeah, don't leave them alone. Watch what's going on. And she might try to mount him even onto his head and you know, show aggressiveness to him. You don't want your buck to get a bad experience mating, especially if he's ... just his first-time mating.

So, you want to just break that up quickly and make sure that doesn't happen. Now what happens if your doe just flat out refuses to mate and you wait a week, you check her fertility and it's just not happening. Okay, well we had that happen to us. As usual I've got a little story. My son had a rabbit ... had his rabbit business, as I've said, and he had this doe that was his favorite doe. She was just his favorite color and he really wanted to mate her and she just would not accept the buck. She just wouldn't do it. So, I called up my friends, my rabbit friends, and I said, okay, how do I do this? Right? And they gave me some little tips. They sound a little unusual to me. First of all, they told me to give the rabbit, raspberry tea; Celestial Seasonings raspberry tea.

So, then they told me to put a sun lamp on her. She wasn't getting enough light. They told me to feed her black oil sunflower seeds and take her for a ride in the car. So, we did these things and at one point I'm cooking in the kitchen and I look up and I see this rabbit who is now in my house with a sunlamp shining, a full spectrum sunlamp shining on her and she's drinking out of the cup that I had made tea for her. She's eating black oil sunflower seeds. So, I'm thinking I sunk to a whole new level. I am now making tea for my rabbits at high noon, feeding them crumpets and taking them for a Sunday drive. What has happened to my life, right? And I thought to myself, I bet my friends are somewhere laughing

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hysterically. They're like, "Ha, she bought that. I can't believe she's actually doing that." But anyway, no, they were serious. So, while that all sounds ridiculous, and I'm not saying you should go to those levels, but you'll do just about anything for your kid. Right? But anyway, I will. So, let's look at the science behind some of the things, suggestions that they made to me and how can you do that in your rabbitry without driving yourself crazy? So, first of all, raspberry leaves are good for production. They can stimulate the doe and as are grape vine leaves. So that was what the raspberry tea was for. I could have just gone out of my garden and gotten some raspberry leaves and sat her. And then the lights. That's one thing I have a problem with in the winter time is that it's recommended that the doe have 12 to 14 hours of daylight to stimulate successful breeding.

So that can be a problem for me in the winter. That's what the light was all about. And then the car ride, well I took them in a travel cage and the bow was ... the doe was right beside the buck for the whole car ride. So, I probably could have just switched their cages like I suggested. I probably could've put the buck in the doe's cage and the doe in the buck's cage and probably gotten had the same results and then the black oil sunflower seeds and you can also give them wheat germ oil or wheat germ on their food. That is a good source of vitamin E which they might be lacking. And then dark leafy greens that I was giving her, that was a good source of vitamin A, which also can be lacking sometimes. So, there was some science behind what they were suggesting. And I will leave a list in the resources with the all these little tips written down. So, if you ever have a really stubborn doe, you can try some of these things with her to get her ready to breed.

Now what was probably more likely with our doe, we didn't really realize was she was probably just too fat. My son had just acquired his rabbits and he was probably loving them with food a little too much. So, what you can do is decrease their ration by a couple of tablespoons per day and get her out of that cage, get her some exercise and then try again. And then, last but not least, sometimes her scent glands can be blocked. So, you want to check that. You can turn her over and just wash the area with mild soap and water just to get that, those scent glands cleaned out so that the buck will be more able to mate with her. Alright, that's kind of about mating, what I have to share with you about mating your rabbits and I hope all those tips will help you to be successful.

So how does climate affect breeding your rabbits? Well, let's start with the South. My breeding time is from October to April. I want to have my last breeding sometime in April so that my grow outs will be grown out by the time that hot weather slams in to Dallas, Texas. One reason you can't breed in the summer is because the buck goes sterile. I know. Let me just lay that, throw that in to the rabbitry as a bomb to go off right in the middle of your rabbitry. Yes, the buck goes temporarily sterile. I know when I got that news, me and my son thought, "Oh really? You're kidding me, right?" Yes, that's true.

So, after about a couple of weeks of 85 degrees Fahrenheit or 30 degrees Celsius, your boy will be shooting blanks. Remember that rabbits are a winter animal. They have this amazing fur coat and it's kind of interesting the way they do cool themselves. They pant a little bit, but they're not really an efficient way of cooling. Mostly they cool themselves through their ears. The blood flow goes through their ears and back down and it cools off the blood. So, rabbits with big ears like this gal are a lot more efficient at cooling themselves. So, I guess it's just nature's way of protecting the doe because she wouldn't want her to be pregnant during the summer heat. And then the babies also because they would be likely that they would die during the summer heat also. So, I guess it's just nature's way of protecting. Now you can bring your buck indoors for the air conditioning so that he will be ready to go as soon as the weather cools off for the does in the fall. So, if you're going to do that, let me show you what we did.

So, let me bring you inside my house and introduce you to Burton Gester. Burton was my son's main buck and the idea was just bring him in during the month, hot month of September, and let him cool off for a few weeks so that he'd be ready to start breeding again when the cool weather came in the fall. Well, as you can see, he really became a house guest, a permanent house guest. So, if you're going to do this, this is the best type of cage to have one that, um, where the poop just falls down into this large reservoir that only has to be cleaned about every week. So, there's wire right

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here that's removable that he can stand on. And that way you can keep it maintained pretty good or your kids can keep it maintained pretty good. But yes, so if you decide to bring your buck in like I did just for the short month of September, you might end up with a permanent house guest; just to warn you.

Oh, and I should say that my son raised Holland Lops, obviously this is not a meat rabbit breed. He wasn't that comfortable with meat rabbits. That was kind of my idea and that's my thing, but he sold these for pets. You can sell these Holland Lops for pets for about \$60 each. So, we're of course in the big city of Dallas, so we have a big market, but he earned money for a scout summer camp and he bought a banjo and he ended up saving for his first car. So, if your kids want to get into raising rabbits, they don't have to raise meat breeds if they're not comfortable with that. They can raise a really cute breed like this.

So, if you have a kiddo that's interested in raising rabbits, even if they don't want to raise meat rabbits, they want to raise maybe Holland Lops like my son did, I'm going to leave a article in the resources that I wrote about how to get your kids started successfully in this business. Like we had our young man approach a neighbor and convince her that he was worth loaning the money. We had him research and we had him keep notes of the costs of his profit and losses. So, he really learned some really valuable entrepreneur skills that he uses today. So, be sure if you have a kiddo that's interested in making rabbits a little business to check that out in the resources.

Now, no matter what you do, breeding them again after that five-month break for the hot weather is just really hard. You're not supposed to have long gaps between breeding your does because it just makes it more difficult to get back into breeding. And also, there's not much light in the winter as we talked about. So, remember that your rabbit needs 12 to 14 hours to really feel like breeding and so there's not much of that in the winter time. Now breeding up North is just the opposite. They have offset breeding time; their breeding time is spring and then on into winter and when it gets really cold, they stop breeding. You can put a heat lamp, say if your rabbits are in a shed, you can put a heat lamp on them. My friend said she did that before and that also provides them with the light and the heat.

So, you can do that but again, it's running electricity out there and the main reason you're not breeding during the winter is because you really don't have room for those grow outs. I mean, it's not like you can put them out in a rabbit tractor in three feet of snow, you know, so there's no forage for them and there's no place to really keep them unless you're going to keep them in a cage with your breeders in that confined space. Maybe if you have them in a shed or something. So, in the North they also, you know, take the winter off and then they get started again in spring. It's a little bit easier for them because, well, it's spring, so rabbits feel like breeding in the spring. That's their instinct. So that's how climate affects breeding your rabbits.

Thank you for joining me for module four. We learned that your rabbit has to be a minimum of six months of age to breed, to start breeding. And then when you can breed your rabbit anytime because her eggs are released in the act of breeding. I taught you how to check and see when your doe is the most fertile. And we learned how to maximize your litter size by breeding in the morning and then again in the evening when those eggs are available there. As you saw, a successful breeding is very dramatic. It's pretty hard to miss, but be sure to stay there and watch. I have heard of does actually castrating the buck before. She gets aggressive with them. So, stay there and watch. Don't let that happen to your buck. Well, climate plays a big role in breeding, especially if you're trying to breed in the off season like I am. I gave you some tricks to trick mother nature and be successful with breeding. Now if you raise rabbits in the South, it might be worth it for you to bring your buck inside for the month of September you so you can get a jump on that cool season breeding time, but just make sure he doesn't become a permanent house guest.

And lastly, I encourage you to get your kids involved. It can become a good learning experience for them. It can teach them responsibility, handling money, and responsibility of doing chores and caring for an animal. And so be sure to check out the article I left in the resources that can give you a good idea on how to set your child up for success and give them those entrepreneurial skills that you want them to have from doing a rabbit business. Join me next time for

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module five when we're going to prepare for those babies. Learn how to support mom during her pregnancy and how to keep her in good condition when she's nursing those babies. And then we're going to talk about what can go wrong with the first-time mom, and how to successfully foster those kits to another doe. And then if you don't have a foster mother, I'm going to teach you how to successfully raise those baby rabbits yourself. So, join me next time and we'll learn more about raising backyard rabbits.