

As rabbit breeders the mating of a pair of rabbits is perhaps the most important thing we do and whilst a buck and doe left together to get on with it will almost certainly produce a litter this method of mating is unsuitable for us.

Because we show rabbits we cannot afford to leave the rabbits in a situation where they may harm each other, so we must contrive the situation.

Both buck and doe must be in perfect health and ready for mating. It is unusual, but not unknown, for bucks not to want to mate.

We would normally expect a buck to be sexually active by about five months of age at the latest. Occasionally a young, six or seven-month old buck will show no interest in a doe. Quite often the only answer to this is patience, although leaving him in with a doe for a few days may ignite his interest if you are confident that the doe will not harm him.

Mature bucks may well have periods during the year, usually when they are moulting, when they will refuse a doe.

A natural process known as 'regression' takes place in bucks, when the buck's testes are withdrawn back into the abdomen and he will not mate.

The breeder can only wait for the testes to descend again when the buck will be more than happy to oblige.

A far more common situation is the unwilling doe; most does will dig or churn their bedding and their vulva will be a deep purple in colour when they want to mate.

So how can you encourage a doe into this state if she is unwilling?

You can remove a buck from his hutch, just before his hutch is due for cleaning so that there is a good strong 'buck smell' to the hutch and then place the doe in his hutch for a day or two. To aid this process feed a high vitamin C diet, baked brown bread is particularly good.

Once both buck and doe

are in a co-operative mood then you have to decide how you are going to mate them.

There are three basic methods of mating rabbits and each of them has its followers; as I say so often in this

problem with this method of mating; if you leave them in a hutch together you may not be there when the mating takes

Notes from the Shed

by Geoff Russell

Breeding Techniques



column: **'there are no right and wrong ways with rabbits and it is what works for you that is best for you'.**

The first method, and probably the most commonly used is to put the doe in with the buck in his hutch (never put the buck in the doe's hutch, she will not tolerate having another rabbit in her hutch).

They may well chase each other around the hutch for a while as a form of courtship and so long as there is clearly no intention by either to attack or cause harm then this method can be quite satisfactory.

For those who have not used this method of mating rabbits before it is worth mentioning here that many rabbits take part in some rather unexpected sexual foreplay; do not be surprised if the doe mounts the buck or they mount each other's heads, these are quite natural practices and will normally result in them getting it right eventually.

You will know when they have mated successfully because the buck will fall off the doe's back, often with a mouthful of hair from her back and letting out a quite loud scream.

This is of course the main

place and therefore you are never really sure if they have mated or not. To overcome this problem many fanciers prefer to use the second method.

The second method of mating is to put the buck and doe together on a table or bench that has a non-slip surface.

The main benefit of using this method is that you have absolute control and are on hand if there is any problem. The reason most breeders prefer this method is that you could well be using your best show buck; after all if he is that good then it is his genes that you wish to perpetuate.

Obviously no breeder would want to risk any damage being done to this buck by either a reluctance or by an over zealous doe.

The other big advantage of this method of mating is that you will know for certain if mating has taken place, as you will be there.

Of course you can only keep the two together like this for so long and so if it a positive coupling is not achieved you will have to return them to their hutches and try again later.

The third and final method is the 'assisted' method; this

is particularly useful for large, heavy breeds where the weight of the buck could very easily damage the doe's spine. To assist the mating in this way is very much a hands-on approach and any breeder who has not used it before and does not feel confident should seek help from an experienced breeder.

The two rabbits to be mated are placed on a firm table or bench with a non-slip surface where you can stand close to them.

If you are right handed, have the doe face to your left and as the buck mounts her put your left hand over the top of both rabbits and then put your left hand under the doe's stomach so that you can apply pressure to raise the doe slightly. Do not lift her too high as she must have her

feet in contact with the bench top.

Whilst you are doing this with your left hand, put your right hand between the buck and the doe so that you can get hold of her tail and gently pull it upwards and out of the buck's way.

Now that you are totally committed with both hands busy you must concentrate because as soon as the buck ejaculates he will fall off the doe, usually with a mouth full of hair from her back and a loud scream and you must be ready to catch him so that he does not fall off of the table and harm himself.

The 'assisted' method of mating may sound difficult but once you have mastered the technique you will have a method of mating where neither rabbit can harm the other and you know when a successful coupling has taken place.

Whichever method of mating you decide to use you have two priorities, a successful coupling achieved and no harm being caused to either rabbit.

There is no right or wrong way and you will use whichever method you feel most comfortable with and have the most success with. Best of luck. □ □