



# THE NURSERY BOX

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Spring litters have arrived after much anticipation and with great expectations as the kits mature and develop into the perfect New Zealand. Well, that is all of our hopes each time a new litter arrives in the rabbitry.

Nest box management during the first 2-3 weeks after kindling will determine the success or failure of the developing rabbit. Several years ago I began to think about how to improve the air quality of the nest box for young kits. There they were, six to eight nice little bunnies in this tall sided wooden box filled with pine shavings and momma's fur. The kits were burrowed deeply in the nest box keeping each other warm and only coming out when it was time to eat. Then it hit me! Six or eight little bunnies using the same space to eat, sleep and GO TO THE BATHROOM!!!!!!! Yuck. How clean could the air really be in this kind of an environment? Now mind you, I have always changed the nesting material and even built some duplex nest boxes with a false floor to separate the bunnies from their.....well you know. But as you can imagine this scenario did not really provide a quality air environment for the bunnies.

This is when I came up with the idea. How about constructing a smaller version of the nest box that addressed air quality as well as providing a comfortable area for the young bunnies. The result of this brainstorming was the construction of what is now known as the nursery box. The box can be made out of white pine or plywood (non-treated lumber), 1/2" x 1" floor wire and peg board. The finished nursery box is 14" wide x 8" deep (inside dimensions) with 4" high sides. Cut a half moon shape in the middle of the front panel that will allow the young bunnies to easily enter and exit. Cut a piece of floor wire and attach as the bottom of the box. Using the inside dimensions of the floor, cut a piece of peg board that can be used as an insert during cooler times of the year such as late fall, winter and early spring. Pine shavings are recommended for bedding during this time of year. During late spring, summer and early fall it is only necessary to use the wire floor.

I replace the nest box with a nursery box when the litter is two weeks of age for spring, summer and early fall born litters. For late fall, winter and early spring litters I use the nursery box at three weeks of age using the peg board floor insert with pine shavings as bedding. For my rabbitry this system works great! Individuals with outdoor hutches, especially during cold weather, using the nursery box may not be a viable option.

What I like most about nursery boxes is how they provide a quality air environment for litters which can prevent respiratory ailments such as snuffles. The other advantages observed are that the young bunnies will start eating pellets at an earlier age (3 weeks vs 4 weeks), stay cooler during times of warm temperatures because they can spread out in a more open environment.

So strap on your tool belt and construct a few nursery boxes and see for yourself the benefits of creating a clean air environment for those new arrivals.