

# Ten steps for coping with summer

Each year, the extreme heat of the Australian Summers claims many small animals. There are several inexpensive and sensible steps you can take to help prevent any stress to your animals.

1. Move your hutches into a well-ventilated, shaded area. Unless someone in the family has an allergy to the rabbit or guinea pig fur, consider bringing them into the house into an inside cage, or to run in the bathroom which is often the coolest room in the house.
2. If your local fruit shop has spare foam boxes, putting them onto the roof of the outside run to help provide insulation. Just put them where bunny can reach up and chew them.
3. Throwing a towel over the hutch and then wetting it down periodically will also really help. I did this for many years.
4. Be careful off crowding in high temperatures. It's important that you make sure that there is sufficient space if more than one animal shares a hutch.
5. A cheap spray bottle and give a light mist of water to cool off your pet, whether they are housed indoors or outdoors. Rabbits maintain their temperatures through their ears, so wetting their ears really helps.
6. Placing some terracotta tiles on the floor of the hutch for them to stretch out on, helps cool them off as well.
7. A small plastic water or soft drink bottle that has been frozen can provide a few hours of respite. If possible, have more than one so that you can rotate the bottles if necessary. Freezing apple juice or pineapple juice is a real treat for them during the day will also help lower their temperature. Try not to use freezer bricks or any chemical sachets as animals love to chew, and will chew these poisonous blocks given a chance.
8. Chilled lettuce leaves will also provide a refreshing snack during the heat of the day, as well as provide further cooling relief.
9. Every water bottle should be checked regularly also. If the bottle is not cool to the touch, replace it with a new bottle filled with cool water. Rabbits and guinea pigs will not drink warm water and can die of thirst with a full, but warm bottle attached to their cage.
10. Always check your local weather report in advance, so that if the forecast is for 30 or above you have cause for concern for your pet. If you are not able to check your animals regularly on these days, you should make arrangements for a friend or neighbour to look in on them, and make sure they understand the signs to watch out for and what actions need to be taken.

Despite your best planning, some or all of your small animal pets may still suffer from the heat. Signs of heat stroke are panting, salivation, ear reddening, weakness, refusal to move, delirium, convulsions and, eventually, death. Heat stroke can be successfully treated if recognized early. The most noticeable and immediate reaction to heat is panting and salivation. Once this is noticed, quick action is required. The fastest and easiest thing to do is to fill clean spray bottle with cool water from the tap and gently spray the afflicted animals with a fine, cool mist. Guinea pigs and rabbits can be dipped into a bucket of cool water --- not chilled; otherwise they could go into shock. Once these first-aid measures are undertaken, a vet should be contacted immediately if any of the heart stroke symptoms are not alleviated by these actions.

Good luck with the heat and keep your animals as well as yourself cool.

Susan Batho & Bill Hupe  
Beau Rabbit Stud  
[www.beaurabbitstud.com](http://www.beaurabbitstud.com)