

IS A TAN RIGHT FOR ME?

Provided by Blue Ribbon Rabbitry

While it is true that rabbits have individual personalities, it is also true that there are certain traits common to each breed. Some breeds are laid back. Some breeds are high strung. Some breeds are more likely to bite. Point being: all breeds are different.

It is extremely frustrating when false information is disseminated (e.g., I often hear that Tans are aggressive -- NOT true). However, I find it equally frustrating when breeders do not acknowledge the negative traits of their breed. All breeds have their pros and cons and it is important to acknowledge both so that others can make an informed decision about whether or not this beautiful breed is a perfect fit.

My intention in writing this article is to provide you with important details regarding the breed so that you can make an informed decision. Most of the information you will find pertains to temperament, but I also included other important information as necessary.

Temperament: Tans are high strung, active rabbits. They are intentionally bred to have lots of personality and be always on the go. Tans are often referred to as a "running breed." That term is a bit confusing as Tans are not evaluated based on their running ability. Rather, Tans are allowed to move freely on the show table while being evaluated. In contrast, most other breeds are posed and must remain still during examination.

A properly socialized Tan should not be aggressive. I have never had an issue with aggression in my herd, nor do I generally have problems with other breeder's Tans when I judge them at shows. That being said, I can understand how a high strung, anxious rabbit could become aggressive if not treated properly or not regularly socialized or handled. On the very rare occasions I have encountered Tans that are a bit aggressive I have gotten the impression that the original breeder did not handle their rabbits regularly.

It is important to note that Tans are NOT "cuddly" rabbits. That being said, rabbits in general are not cuddly. Rabbits are prey animals. Being held is not a natural nor a comforting feeling for most rabbits. There are some breeds that are more laid back than others. And there are some individual animals that are anomalies and love being held. But in general you should not expect a rabbit to sit still no matter how much it has been handled and loved. If given the opportunity any rabbit will kick and scratch and try to free itself. Most breeds can be carried with their heads tucked into your armpit and if they feel secure will remain calm. Good luck doing that with a Tan!

Buck v. Doe: Bucks tend to be more docile in general. If you are wanting one rabbit and have no plans to breed I would recommend a buck. In addition to bucks being more calm, they have tend to hold their show prime longer than does. Also, once does hit sexual maturity they become more concerned with finding a mate and less cooperative in moving about freely on the show table.

Does of any breed can be a bit snippy and cage territorial once they reach sexual maturity. I find that does tend to be more cage territorial in larger cages. It makes sense as a doe in a smaller cage has less territory to defend. Also, does with litters can be protective as well. Most does allow me to do what I need to do in their cage with no issues. Others are a bit less cooperative. I think there is a big difference between a mother protecting her young and a rabbit being innately aggressive. None act in an overtly aggressive manner or else they would not remain in my breeding program. I am sure any of you who have children can relate. If you are respectful of a doe's protective motherly instinct and her evaluated hormones and approach her accordingly you will be fine.

Breeding Prognosis: Good news first -- Tans do not produce "mismarked" litters. That means all rabbits in a litter will be Tan patterned. The quality of the markings will vary (in addition to type, fur and color) but all will have markings that meet the minimum requirements to be shown.

The quality of the rabbits you get in a litter will depend on two variables: 1) The quality of the parents and 2) The lineage of the parents. A rabbit that has been linebred for many generations will produce animals of a certain quality fairly consistently (for better or worse). Rabbits that have mixed backgrounds will have more genetic diversity and accordingly will produce animals that are more varied in terms of quality as well.

Tans thankfully do not have many common genetic flaws. Be on the lookout for: split penis*, malocclusion and/or butting teeth and one or more missing testicles. I have also noticed that certain lines have issues with white spots. I am not sure where this comes from originally, but I have noticed this issue consistently with certain herds.

**My understanding is that this is congenital and not genetic in origin. Personally I err on the side of caution and do not use animals with split penis in my herd.*

Now for the bad news -- In terms of actually getting Tans to successfully breed, I do find that they have conception rates on par with any other breeds. However, I do find that Tans are more likely to cannibalize their young, accidentally stomp them in the nestbox and/or have them scattered on the wire. This is not particularly shocking given the nature of this breed. Remember: they are high strung and active.

I know some breeders will read the above and disagree. That's great! I hope you have better luck than me! But nevertheless I do believe that in general most breeders have the same bad luck. Remember also that your perception of whether or not Tans are difficult is relative. If you have raised Dwarfs and Hollands you might not feel like Tans are that difficult to raise. But if you (like me!) have raised Florida Whites, Havanas, Dutch, New Zealands, etc. Tans are much more difficult in contrast.

Show Preparation: Tans are a time consuming breed. Personality is largely genetic and you will want to breed for active animals. But Tans must still be trained to move on the show table. Most breeders have running tables in their rabbitry or large exercise pens. During times when life has been busy and I spend less time running rabbits I find a significant difference in how they perform (or move) on the show table. When people ask how often to run their rabbits my answer is always: as often as possible. Everyone has work, school, hobbies, etc. But you will need to set aside time if you want your rabbits to be prepared for the show table. If you are exceptionally

busy Tans might not be the best breed for you.

While prepping rabbits for shows be sure to be on the lookout for broken tails, ripped toenails or ripped teeth. Because Tans are high strung they are injury prone than other breeds. While a serious injury will be noticeable, a small injury is easy to overlook. By continuously examining each rabbit you will be less likely to inadvertently show a rabbit with a disqualification.

Showing: I am lucky to live in a part of the country that has the biggest numbers at shows. I enjoy that. I want to show my animals against other great animals because it challenges me to be a better breeder. Nothing is more frustrating than showing against yourself and winning by default. What is the point? Tans are not (at least not consistently) a popular breed outside the Midwest (particularly outside Indiana/Michigan). The breed is growing. If you want a challenge: take the breed up and get other breeders started.

Evaluation: I believe that running breeds are a difficult breed for newbies to learn. Conformation is much easier to learn if you have an animal that sits still. I have raised Tans for many years and I still find judging running breeds to be more challenging than any other breed. If you are up for a challenge: this is your breed!