

POINTS TO PONDER

A Pedigree Angora is:

a rabbit that breeds true, producing progeny the same colour(s) as the parents through each generation and in its history contains no other colour than those permitted. There are thirteen established pedigree colours and each one has its own breed standard to which it must conform, eg Smoke may be mated to blue - only these two colours should be found in a Smoke/Blue rabbits history or its progeny.

A Pure-bred Angora is:

one that has no other type of rabbit in its history, but does not breed true. The progeny may not be the same colour(s) as the parents, but may be a mix of colours that do not conform to any breed standard, eg Cream may safely be mated to Blue-cream, but only these colours should be present in a litter - not white, sable, blue, smoke, etc. Cream x Blue DOES NOT produce Blue-cream.

Following on from this, there are four colours that may safely be mated to a white - chocolate, chinchilla, sable, brown-grey. There is no detriment to the white, but a repeated white x colour mating can produce an undesirable white base to the coat of the coloured rabbits, but there have been a few incidents this year where good pedigree white x correct colour rabbits have produced progeny decidedly odd in colour. In general, the coloured genes are recessive to the white genes, so litters from white/colour matings tend to contain more whites than colours. Now problems arise when, for example, a sable is mated to a white carrying chinchillated genes. As a result two recessive genes can meet, as they are both recessive the colours mix, producing a very pretty, odd coloured baby that does not conform to any breed standard, ie a pure-bred NOT a pedigree rabbit.

Now I often get asked the question "Should I clip my rabbits during the winter?". My answer is always the same - "I've never lost a rabbit from the cold, but I have from wool binding, ie the formation of a wool ball anywhere in the digestive system that causes a blockage and eventual death." I don't mean I clip indiscriminately, but if a rabbit goes into full moult and starts leaving wool around the cage, I think clipping is the only solution. If the weather suddenly turns cold, I would suggest letting the rabbit acclimatise itself for a few days first, or if really cold, ie snow or repeated hard frosts, look for a milder window in the weather. The large paper diet bags are very good insulators so if forced to clip when really cold, I lay them over the cages and give plenty of bedding. In cold weather I always give my rabbits warm water, which

they enjoy. A tip I was given that helps prevent wool balls from forming is to give the rabbits 5mls of wheatgerm oil at every clip. It can be given using a small syringe. Wheatgerm oil also contains vitamin E which should help with breeding. One of the first symptoms of wool binding is loss of appetite and lethargy and as the ball forms, the droppings become strung together to form chains. If I get a rabbit with these symptoms, I clip immediately, whatever the length of coat.

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Angoras are not the best of mothers - as I'm sure you all know! I never rear more than four in a litter - more often than not, two or three - but especially at this time of year when some does do not produce much milk, I foster babies around. One or two for those without much milk, three or four for those who could open a milk bar! Remove the would-be foster mum from the cage and give her something nice to eat. Next find a nice smelly patch of foster-mums manure and give the baby to be fostered a thorough rub with it all over. Then pop it into the nest. Put fresh food and water and some clean straw into the cage/nest box, then pop mum back in. Providing you have obliterated any foreign odours by rubbing with manure, the doe will accept the baby. I rarely have any rejections using this method. If you have a different method, let me know or better still, write an article for next year's book! (hint, hint).

Lesley