

Eenie, Meenie, Miney, Mo...

What color buck should I breed to my doe?

A (hopefully) simple guide to color crosses by Heather Dunaway

Popups, unshowable colors, colors you don't raise, all of these can be avoided (mostly) if you follow a few simple color cross rules. If you are like me, the genetic letter codes for colors look like Egyptian hieroglyphics, so I'll just use the actual color names.

Black: Some people treat black as a catch all that can be bred to any color. Not true all of the time unfortunately. Black can be very useful in most color crosses, but you have to be careful of what is in that rabbit's background. A black that carries dilute or chocolate, bred to a gray, can lead to problems. You could end up with opal, lynx, or amber, depending on what recessives the parents carry. A black that carries dilute or chocolate, bred to a tort, can give you blue/chocolate/lilac torts. Make sure you study your pedigrees and cross your blacks with what colors they already have in the background (unless it's a rainbow). A black with a blue background? Cross to blue. A black with a gray background? Cross to gray.

Blue: Blue should only be bred to black (with a blue background) and blue. I've seen rabbits come from blue/lilac crosses or blue/chocolate crosses that can't be called either a blue or a lilac. Make sure you cross in black every few generations to keep the blue color strong.

Chocolate: Chocolate should only be bred to lilac and chocolate. In some cases, if you are careful with your crosses (and future crosses), you can cross chocolate and black. Those chocolate/black crosses should be kept separate from your other color projects as they can cause problems down the road.

Gold: Gold should only be bred to gold. Crossing in other colors with this variety can be a disaster. There are enough issues with golds right now (blue/chocolate/lilac torts being shown as gold being the main one I run into). The standard calls for a bright, clean, gold color. That does leave some room for interpretation, but there should be NO smut/shading in the markings. When you cross other colors into gold, it can cause the shading to pop up. On occasion, black can be crossed in. It can help darken the gold

color if it starts to get frosted or faded. But keep an eye on what is in the background of any black that you may cross in.

Gray: Gray should only be bred to gray and black with a gray background. If you cross in blue/chocolate/lilac, you'll be plagued with unshowable colors for generations. If you cross in tort, that can ruin the color on the resulting grays, not to mention the mess it can cause with torts and giving you more unshowable colors.

Lilac: Lilac should only be bred to chocolate and lilac. As I mentioned with the blues, crossing black or blue in with them could give you rabbits that are neither blue or lilac. Avoid crossing them with gold, gray, and tort, so you won't get unshowable shades of those varieties.

Tort: Tort should only be bred to tort and black with a tort background. Any other self color mixed in will cause blue/chocolate/lilac torts, which are not showable. Crossing with gold or gray will result in even more unshowable colors. Torts need dark BLACK shading on their points. I feel we are losing this because of improper color crosses in this variety.

By following these simple rules, we may just be able to slow down or even eliminate the odd colors that keep popping up in litters. Nothing is worse than looking in the nest box and finding that the best marked rabbit in the litter is an unshowable color. Study your pedigrees and make educated color cross choices. If you do choose to play with mixing colors, or breeding unshowable colors, make sure you disclose that to any buyers. I, for one, would not be thrilled to buy a rabbit and find out it has a ton of unshowable colors, or poor color crosses in the pedigree. We are all in this for the same reason, to perfect the breed. That includes making it so the litters produce colors that you can predict (usually). There will always be the chance of that oddball rabbit popping up, but at least we can minimise it.

Disclaimer: I know not everyone will agree with me on these, but this is how I manage my herd. There are some people that cross the four self colors (black/blue/chocolate/lilac) with no ill effects, and if it's done right, you can get some nice animals. I have made some odd color cross choices myself in the past, but I was very careful to only keep showable colors and to let buyers know beforehand that those crosses were made. Also, keep in mind that the rabbit color genetics gods will laugh at you again and again. No matter how diligent you are with your crosses, something someone crossed 7 or more generations back, can cause issues.