Just a few days ago, my Netherland Dwarf doe gave birth to an unusually large litter of five rabbits. The litter contained three healthy babies, and unfortunately, two peanuts. For many Dwarf raisers, peanuts are a sad but normal part of the breeding process. However, for new breeders, or those with soft spot for baby bunnies, losing peanuts can be hard, and most breeders will understand that. For those of you who have no idea what I’m talking about, or would like to know exactly how peanuts can come from rabbits, this article should help to explain.

Peanuts are baby rabbits that have two dwarf genes, one from each parent. It is possible to get peanuts in Holland Lop or Dwarf Hotot litters, and theoretically any breed with the dwarf gene. When two true dwarfs, carriers of the dwarf gene, are bred, it is guaranteed that there will be one peanut in an average litter of four. The use of a brood doe is a good way to avoid peanuts, because brood does do not carry the dwarf gene, it can be bred to a buck that carries the gene and produce a litter of true dwarfs with no chance of a peanut. However, the offspring may not be of the same show quality as the offspring of two true dwarfs. In fact, some of the best show dwarfs come from litters with peanuts.

Peanuts usually live up to three days, but it is best to dispose of the peanuts as soon as they are born, however, many young breeders, especially 4-H kids like myself, may have a hard time knowing one of their rabbit’s newborn babies must be "disposed of." If that is the case, the peanuts can be left with the litter until they die naturally, as they cause no harm to their siblings as long as they are removed from the nest box as soon as they die. Still, it is also hard to watch the peanuts decline, but unfortunately nothing can be done to save the little babies. If it is uncertain that a baby is a peanut, some distinguishing, tell-tale signs become more pronounced each day that the peanuts are alive. On the first day, the babies look relatively healthy. Their bellies seem full and they look similar to their siblings, except they will be noticeably smaller. Their heads are also too big for their bodies. If you take the suspected peanut and compare it to a larger baby, you will notice that its hindquarters are smaller than its head. However, the healthy baby’s hindquarters are the same size and provide balance to the head. If you look at just the head and ribcage of each of them, the peanut will most likely look like the other. However, the healthy baby’s hindquarters are the same size and provide balance to the head, while the peanut’s hips and tailbone come to a point (deformed). The peanuts hind legs are very small and weak looking, and their ears are placed further back on the head. On the second day, the main difference is that they seem skinnier than they were the day before, while the others still seem the same size. The reason that the peanuts are so thin is because they are born without the ability to process food. It is suspected that they have malformed digestive systems as well as hindquarters. By the third day the peanuts are noticeably less active and are emaciated, while the others have grown considerably since birth. They probably won’t make it past this day. Another genetic defect that can appear in dwarf litters is the Max Factor. I think I have had a litter of Max Factor babies, but I didn’t know it at the time. Max Factor babies, or frog babies, are usually born with their eye slits open, which makes them prone to eye infections. I’ve heard that they live longer than peanuts, but the ones I had were stillborn. There were only two in the litter I had, and they were delivered late (about 35 days after breeding) so they were huge. I’m not sure if that was a result of the Max Factor gene, or just because they were delivered so late. Max Factor babies also are born with some form of deformity of the hind feet, such as webbed feet without
toes, or extra toes. The feet are also turned inward, and can look like they are upside down. As I said, I didn’t know about the Max Factor gene when I got that litter, so I have not experienced and interpreted this information in the same way as with the peanuts. One of the main reasons that I believe that this was a litter with Max Factor babies is that the doe fits the characteristics of a rabbit that carries the Max Factor gene. To get Max Factor babies, both parents must carry the gene. The gene causes the rabbits to have softer fur, more like hair than fur. I think it feels kind of like satin fur, or the fur of some Beveren’s with imported lines (angora like qualities). The fur quality is very good. Max Factor carriers also have longer hair tufts between their ears, and around their cheeks, which makes their heads look really round (that’s a good thing). The siblings of Max Factor babies have superior development compared to other Netherland Dwarfs.

If you end up with peanuts or Max Factor babies in any of your litters, don’t be dismayed. It is sad to lose the babies, but some of the best, show winning rabbits are the siblings of peanuts or Maxes.

Citation: