



RABBIT NUTRITION

Rabbits are herbivores, which mean they live on grasses, leafy greens, roots, fruits and vegetables. Understanding how your pet rabbit's digestive system works is an important part of correctly feeding them what is most efficient for their body to use. Rabbits need to get as many nutrients as possible.

Their GI tract produces special droppings that they consume so they can be digested a second time. They are called cecotrophs, or "night feces", because they are usually consumed late at night or early in the morning. You will not usually see many of these "night feces" as they are consumed immediately as they are passed. If you see too many in your rabbit's cage please consult your veterinarian.

What's on the menu?

The bulk of a rabbit's diet must consist of quality rabbit pellets, fresh timothy hay (alfalfa hay is often too rich for them), water and fresh vegetables. Anything else seen on the rabbit's menu can be considered a "treat" and given in small amounts. The amounts of each component of the diet will vary with a rabbit's age. Weaned rabbits just starting to eat solid food and cecotrophs (night feces) can be given alfalfa hay and pellets. At approximately 7 months, hay should be switched to timothy or oat hay and fewer pellets should be given.

Hay: Hay makes up most of the daily diet. It is essential for optimal and efficient gut function and movement as well as keeping the length of their teeth in check. Rabbits who are not given any kind of hay will eventually suffer from painful abscesses due to long teeth.

- When a rabbit's gastrointestinal tract motility is diminished or stops operating normally altogether, the result is *gastrointestinal stasis*, considered a "silent killer" of rabbits because it means a hardening or buildup of food in the gut causing a blockage that may lead to their death.
- Timothy and other grass hays are preferred for adults, but young rabbits can have a little alfalfa mixed in. Alfalfa is high in calcium and protein, both of which are important at early stages of rabbit development but much less important for adult rabbits. Lower quality grass hay can be used for the rabbit's litter box. If your rabbit is not a big fan of hay, you can purchase bags of hay that have dried herbs, fruits and veggies in it to make it more enticing or palatable.
- Fresh hay should be available to an adult rabbit 24 hours a day. It is said that a rabbit needs to eat "his size" (not his weight) in hay every day to stay healthy.

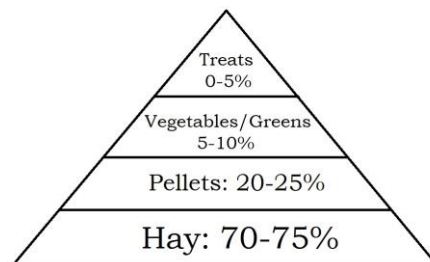
Pellets: Rabbit food pellets are highly concentrated in nutrients that help with weight gain. Pellets are more important for young rabbits that are still growing. Make sure what you are buying is high in fiber (18% - 20%) and nutritionally balanced. Higher quantities of hay and vegetables should replace pellets in a mature adult rabbit. Feeding an adult rabbit a large amount of pellets can cause obesity. A good rule of thumb when measuring out pellets for an adult rabbit: feed no more than what can fit in one egg cup in an egg carton.

Treats: Treats high in calories such as oats, barley and fruits should be given sparingly. Too many carbohydrates can lead to enteritis or other conditions/illnesses in rabbits.

Water: Water is very important for rabbits and should be fresh and available at all times. Water bottles are best used for rabbits instead of water bowls. The water should be changed every day and the bottle cleaned with dish soap 1x per week.

Vegetables: Vegetables provide valuable roughage, as well as essential vitamins. As early as 3 months of age, you can begin to offer vegetables. Introduce new vegetables one at a time. This way, if a digestive upset occurs, you will know which food may be the culprit. Eliminate those that cause soft stools or diarrhea. Continue to add new varieties, including both dark leafy vegetables and root vegetables, and serve vegetables of different colors. Once your rabbit is used to several vegetables, feed him or her at least three different kinds daily for a mix of nutrients. Under no circumstances should you feed a rabbit iceberg lettuce as it is void of nutrients, mostly water and will fill a rabbit up unnecessarily.

A Good Rabbit Diet Should Include Daily Fresh Vegetables	
(Those containing a high level of Vitamin A are indicated by an *. Feed at least one of these each day.)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alfalfa, radish, and clover sprouts • Basil • Beet greens (tops) • Bok choy • Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)* • Brussels sprouts • Carrots and carrot tops* • Celery • Cilantro • Clover • Collard greens* • Dandelion greens (NO pesticides)* • Endive* • Escarole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green peppers • Kale* • Mint • Mustard greens* • Parsley* • Pea pods (the flat edible kind)* • Peppermint leaves • Radicchio • Radish tops • Raspberry leaves • Romaine lettuce (NO iceberg or light colored leaf lettuce)* • Spinach* • Watercress* • Wheat grass



Note: Kale, mustard greens, and spinach contain high levels of oxalates (the salts of oxalic acid), which can accumulate in the system and cause toxicity over time. Rather than eliminating these veggies from your list (because they are highly nutritious and loved by most rabbits), limit your use of them to 1 or 2 meals per week.