

THE BUNNY DIET

Information to Get You Started

A bunny can live on a diet of unlimited fresh hay and water; however, as pet owners we like to provide variety for our pets, by including fresh greens and a small amount of fruit and vegetables. Pellets are not necessary for a healthy rabbit and should only be used as a treat or if the bunny is very young, underweight or ill. Sometimes a small amount of pellets can be given as a treat if your bunny has a healthy diet and weight. A bunny's diet will change as it grows, and if they need pellets, an adult will require different pellets to those given to baby rabbits. It is important to discuss this with a bunny savvy vet. **IMPORTANT: If your bunny stops eating**, take them to a bunny savvy vet immediately as they can go into gut stasis, where the gut stops working, which can be fatal if not treated quickly.



Healthy Teeth

Unlimited hay is essential for healthy teeth. Your bunny will also enjoy natural untreated wood to chew such as apple branches. Good sources of wood to chew that has not been exposed to chemicals may include apple, willow, spruce, ash, birch, maple, juniper, pear, hazel and hawthorn. **IMPORTANT: single seeded fruits and fruit trees such as plum, cherry, apricot and peach may be toxic to bunnies as well as a variety of other plants and trees.**

Some Important Points to Remember

- Always introduce new foods slowly and never change your bunny's diet abruptly as this can cause digestion and gut problems.
- Always use fresh fruit and vegetables that you would eat yourself.
- Provide plenty of fresh water.
- Provide branches for your bunny to chew for entertainment. Our bunnies' love apple tree branches as well as the leaves. However, some tree branches are toxic to bunnies.
- Bad diet such as a diet of pellets of seed mixes, is responsible for serious teeth problems, and teeth must be checked by a bunny savvy vet regularly.
- Only provide pellets as a treat or on the advice of your bunny savvy vet, and avoid commercial rabbit seed mixes (even the ones endorsed by celebrities or well known organisations) as most contain corn and other ingredients detrimental to your bunny's health
- Food that is detrimental to your bunny's health and can cause a condition called gut stasis in many young bunnies is explained by Medi-Rabbit as...

Whole seeds and grains, nuts, corn, peas, lentils, beans, potatoes, bamboo shoots, all dairy products, sugary and starchy products. These types of food have been known to contribute to lethal doses of enterotoxaemia especially in young rabbits. Seeds, grain and corn also contain more starch than the rabbit's gut can handle. While some of the starch can pass through the small intestine without problems, the majority will reach the cecum. Here it serves as nutrition for the malignant bacteria that produces toxins and can make your rabbit very sick. In contrast to fibre, which prevents fermentation, starch leads to fermentation processes in the cecum. This may cause an overgrowth of bad bacteria and GI stasis, which can be lethal if left untreated (Medirabbit.com/Diet, viewed March 2007, p20-21)

Suggestions to Get You Started

As bunnies are prey animals and hide illness, feeding your bunnies twice a day ensures that you can see if they are eating and well. If the bunny does not eat then there is time to take them to a bunny savvy vet before their gut stops working altogether and they go into gut stasis which can be fatal.

The Importance of Hay

Your bunny needs an UNLIMITED supply of hay to maintain good digestion and teeth. The primary type of hay should be fresh OATEN HAY. If you have trouble finding oaten hay, then GRASS HAY is the next best alternative.

IMPORTANT: The one type of hay to avoid for adult rabbits (over one year old) is alfalfa/Lucerne hay. Alfalfa is acceptable for young rabbits but because of the high level of calcium should not be fed in large amounts to a mature rabbit as it can cause calcium blocks. Avoid bagged hay as it may not be fresh and can contain mites.



The Bunny Salad



Your bunny should eat one tightly packed cup of a variety of salad greens per 2 kilograms of body weight, twice a day with a small amount of vegetables and fruit as a treat once a day. We give the salad treats in the evening, which encourages our bunnies into their enclosures/hutches. **IMPORTANT: Never give iceberg lettuce, cabbage, raw beans, rhubarb, potato peels or anything with corn, seeds or processed sugar, or human sweets or snacks.**

Good Salad Greens: (Twice a day, washed to remove pesticides) beet tops, bok choy, cilantro, clover, collard greens, dandelion flowers, endive, escarole, mint, mustard greens, parsley, peppermint leaves, radicchio, radish tops, raspberry leaves, romaine, cos and rocket lettuce, spinach, swiss chard, watercress, wheat grass, basil, dill, coriander, chicory, parsley and snow pea sprouts.

Salad Treats: Once a day

Give in small quantities because of high levels of calcium: dutch carrot tops, dandelion greens, kale.

Good Salad Vegetables: green peppers, snow peas, turnip, carrots, broccoli (mostly flowers, cut up the stems into strips and give them in small amounts), very small amount of cauliflower flowers as too much can cause bloat in bunnies.

Good Salad Fruits: Apple (without core and seed), banana, pear, blueberries, grapes (limited quantities), mango, papaya, peach, pear, pineapple, raisins, sultanas, raspberries, strawberries.



Water

Bunnies need an unlimited supply of fresh water each day. Provide fresh water in a sturdy ceramic bowl, as most bunnies do not get enough water through water bottles especially during the hot weather. If you use a water bottle, also supply a bowl of water for your bunny. Dehydration can contribute to many health conditions.