

Rabbit Diet: What to Feed a Bunny

PET NUTRITION (/PET-NUTRITION) BUNNIES/RABBITS (/BUNNIESRABBITS)



What should pet bunnies eat? Contrary to popular belief, rabbits need to eat more than just carrots and lettuce. They require a balanced diet of hay, fresh veggies and fruit, and a few pellets. Rabbits have very sensitive digestive tracts, so the transition to hay or pellets, or the introduction of new fruits and vegetables, must be done gradually to allow the rabbit's system to adjust.

Hay: The staple of a rabbit's diet

The bottom of a rabbit food pyramid would contain long-stemmed fiber, in the form of hay, which makes up 80 to 90 percent of a rabbit's diet. As grazing animals, rabbits need to have an unlimited supply of fresh hay daily.

You'll want to feed your rabbit grass hays. Good types of grass hay for bunnies are timothy, orchard grass, brome and oat hay. You can feed your bunnies either one type or a mixture of different grass hays. Buy the freshest hay possible and check for the presence of mold or dust, which could make

your rabbit sick.

Alfalfa hay is not a good choice for an adult rabbit, since it's a legume, not a grass, and as such is too rich to be fed on a daily basis. Alfalfa can be given to rabbits once in awhile as a treat. Rabbits under one year of age can be fed alfalfa hay, but as they get older they should be switched to grass hay, especially if they are also being fed alfalfa pellets.

Pellets: Feed a bunny small quantities

Timothy hay pellets can be given to bunnies in small quantities. An average-sized (6-10 pounds) adult rabbit only needs one-quarter cup of pellets daily. If your rabbit is under five pounds, feed just one-eighth of a cup. Rabbits larger than 10 pounds do not need more than a quarter of a cup, since it's not a crucial part of a bunny's diet.

Rabbits under one year old can be fed alfalfa pellets. Be sure to feed grass hay (rather than alfalfa) if you are feeding your young rabbit alfalfa pellets. Look for pellets with a high fiber content — the higher the better. Do not buy the rabbit pellets that have dried corn, nuts and seeds added, because those foods can potentially be very harmful for rabbits.

Vegetables: A rabbit's favorite foods

Rabbits count vegetables and herbs among their favorite foods. Most greens found in a supermarket are safe for rabbits, with a few limitations and exceptions. (See the list of foods to avoid below.)

No more than two cups daily of fresh vegetables should be given to adult rabbits. Dwarf breeds and rabbits under five pounds should get just one cup of fresh veggies per day. A variety of two or three vegetables is ideal. Add one new vegetable at a time, and watch for signs of loose stool or diarrhea because, as mentioned above, bunnies have delicate digestive systems. Certain vegetables can be given every day, while others should be fed sparingly, one or two times a week.

Do not feed your rabbit potatoes, corn, beans, seeds or nuts. These foods are difficult for rabbits to digest and can cause serious digestive problems.

Vegetables that can be fed to a rabbit daily:

- Bell peppers
- Bok choy
- Brussels sprouts
- Carrot tops
- Cucumber

- Endive
- Escarole
- Fennel
- Herbs: basil, cilantro, dill, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, thyme
- Lettuces: romaine, green leaf, red leaf, Boston bibb, arugula, butter
- Okra leaves
- Radicchio
- Radish tops
- Sprouts: alfalfa, radish, clover
- Watercress
- Wheatgrass
- Zucchini

Vegetables and plants to give sparingly (one or two times a week) to a bunny:

- Broccoli (stems and leaves only)
- Carrots
- Chard
- Clover
- Collard greens
- Dandelion greens (pesticide-free)
- Flowers: calendula, chamomile, daylily, dianthus, English daisy, hibiscus, honeysuckle, marigold, nasturtium, pansy, rose
- Kale
- Spinach

Fruit: Give to a bunny once or twice per week

Fruit should be given to your bunny one or two times a week. The appropriate serving is one to two tablespoons of fruit (either one kind or a mixture) per five pounds of body weight. As with vegetables, fruit should be introduced slowly and one at a time.

Fruit to feed your rabbit (one or two times a week):

- Apple (no seeds)
- Banana
- Berries: blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, cranberries
- Cherries (no seeds)
- Grapes
- Melon
- Nectarine
- Orange

- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Plum
- Watermelon

Treats: Feed to a rabbit sparingly

Like lots of people, many rabbits have a sweet tooth. As with humans, treats are at the top of the food pyramid for bunnies and therefore should be fed sparingly. Healthy treats for your bunny include small pieces of fresh or freeze-dried fruit (the approved fruits listed above); natural, unprocessed mixes that include hay and dried flowers (the approved flowers listed above); and Oxbow brand rabbit treats.

Always read the ingredient list on store-bought treats because not all of them are safe for bunnies. Avoid treats that include added sugar, preservatives and artificial coloring, and never give your rabbit human treats.

Foods to avoid giving a rabbit

Some foods are not good for rabbits under any circumstances because they can make rabbits extremely sick. Here are foods to avoid giving your bunny completely:

- All human treats
- Beans
- Beet greens
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Cereal
- Chocolate
- Corn or corn-cob treats
- Crackers
- Iceberg lettuce
- Legumes
- Mustard greens
- Nuts
- Pasta
- Peas
- Potatoes

- Rhubarb
- Seeds
- Sugar
- Turnip greens
- Yogurt

Fresh water: Unlimited supply for a bunny

Finally, rabbits need to stay hydrated, so they should have an unlimited supply of fresh water, which should be changed daily. The water container should be cleaned with soap and water every few days. Water bottles are not easy to clean and can be difficult for rabbits to use, so bowls are better. A heavy ceramic bowl is ideal, since it doesn't tip over easily.

Additional rabbit info and resources (</article/rabbit-information-and-resources>)

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