

Diet Sheet for Rabbits

There is a lot of misleading advice offered to rabbit owners about how they should feed their rabbits

Essentially rabbits were made to eat a diet composed mainly of grass and other wild greens. The majority of your pet's food should be in the form of grass (when available), fresh greens and good quality hay. Hay is particularly important as it is an all year round, essential part of his diet. Choose good quality hay (Timothy Hay is the best) and make sure it is clean and free from dust or mould. Ideally this should be offered in some sort of rack to keep it raised off the floor of the hutch.

Most rabbits are fed some sort of pelleted 'concentrate' food. This is a balanced mix of ingredients and should be fed in small quantities as a supplement to the roughage we have discussed. Overfeeding of such rabbit mixes is the commonest cause of digestive upsets and diarrhoea. In addition overfeeding can quickly lead to excessive weight gain.

A small amount (1 tablespoon for a dwarf rabbit and 2 for a larger breed would be maximum amounts) in a bowl twice a day is all that is required. If it is not all eaten, then what is left over should be removed – ***rabbit mix should never be left in the bowl all day for a rabbit*** to feed on when it gets bored or fancies a nibble. This is when it should be eating roughage. Many people complain that their rabbit won't eat hay. This is almost always because they have too much other food – especially rabbit mix – on offer and they are choosing the 'easy option', but that is not the best option! Rabbit's teeth grow continually through their lives and they rely on plenty of roughage to keep their teeth worn down. Unsuitable diets and feeding too much concentrate is the most common cause of bone and dental disease in pet rabbits.

A selection of greens from the kitchen (lettuce, cabbage, salad leaves etc), vegetables (broccoli, carrots etc), fresh herbs (chives, basil, coriander etc), flowers (for example roses and nasturtiums) and small amounts of fruit (for example apples and banana) can be offered too. Some root vegetables (e.g. parsnip, swede) are ok but not too much as they are very starchy. Try to offer a variety rather than too much of any one particular sort. A good handful twice a day should be enough.

Key points

- Think of what a rabbit eats in the wild – that is the best and healthiest diet for your pet rabbit.
- **70 %** of your rabbits diet should be roughage in the form of hay or grass
- **25 %** or more should be greens, vegetables, herbs, flowers and fruit.
- Less than **5 %** should be dry 'rabbit food' mix that you feed in a bowl.
- If you need to make changes then don't change everything overnight as this might upset your pet's digestion. Make changes gradually over a week or two and your pet will easily adapt to its new, improved diet.