

FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

RABBITS EAT GRASS!

And have been designed to do so over many centuries!

In the wild they graze from a large variety of different grasses, weeds and bushes and during the winter they eat dried grass that they have stored in their burrows for this purpose.

Despite this fact, people mistakenly feed large quantities of dry foods and fail to give them access to essential grass, hay or greens.



Commercial dry foods such as muesli mixes and pelleted feeds were originally designed for rapid growth in rabbits that were destined for the laboratory, meat or fur trade; that is: *not long lived rabbits*. In the last few years pet stores and rabbit owners have been feeding more and more of these foods and correspondingly we are seeing an increase in the health problems directly linked to such diets including dental disease, abscesses, diarrhoea and subsequent fly strike, obesity and gut stasis.

So, how should you feed your rabbit?

- **Good-quality hay or grass** should make up the majority (75-80%) of the diet. In reality, this means free access to grass or offering a large amount of hay to your rabbit daily to allow them to eat as much as they want. Lawnmower clippings should never be used as they ferment rapidly and may have petrol residues on them.
- Commercial foods can be offered in small quantities. Muesli mixes should not be fed. Muesli allows rabbits to eat the bits which they like best and has been directly linked to diseases such as dental disease. Complete pellet diets are preferred. The ideal amount of pellets will depend on your individual rabbit and their weight, activity levels and growth but we usually start with 15 – 20g/kg of rabbit a day maximum. Pellets should be used for training and enrichment and never fed out of a bowl.
- **Greens, weeds and herbs** should make up the remainder of the diet (see recommended list below) and 1 handful may be fed twice daily
- Fruits and starchy or sugary vegetables such as carrots should only be fed as an occasional monthly treat in small quantities due to their high sugar content

Any changes to your rabbit's diet should happen slowly over the course of a few weeks – rapid changes can lead to lack of acceptance, diarrhoea, gut stasis or weight loss. Some rabbits may develop diarrhoea when greens are initially offered. You can help by only introducing one new vegetable or fruit at a time and feeding it for several days. In most cases the diarrhoea will stop after a few days without intervention, if it doesn't then stop feeding that item and increase hay feeding for a few days or ring your vet. The key to avoiding upset tummies is to feed greens every day to allow their digestive system to acclimatize to it.

The following are a list of plants safe for your rabbit to eat:

- Artichoke leaves
- Asparagus
- Beetroot (care with leafy tops as high levels of oxalic acid)
- Broccoli (and its leaves, including purple sprouting varieties)
- Cabbage (can sometimes cause digestive upsets)
- Carrots (and carrot tops) – should be limited as they are high in sugars
- Cauliflower (and the leaves)
- Celeriac
- Celery (and its leaves)
- Chicory
- Courgette (and flowers)
- Cucumber
- Curly Kale
- Fennel
- Green beans
- Kohl rabi
- Parsnip
- Peas (including the leaves and pods)
- Radish Tops
- Rocket
- Romaine lettuce (not Iceberg or light coloured leaf)
- Spinach (only occasional)
- Spring Greens
- Turnip (only occasional)
- Watercress



Herbs (often powerful tastes so may take some getting used to):

- Basil
- Coriander
- Dill
- Mint (peppermint)
- Parsley
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme

Wild Garden Herbs/Weeds/Flowers:

- Calendula
- Camomile
- Chickweed
- Clover (leaves and flowers)
- Comfrey
- Dandelion
- Goosegrass (cleavers) but may stick to coat!
- Lavender
- Mallow
- Nettle
- Nasturtium (leaves and flowers)
- Shepherd's purse
- Sow Thistle
- Plantain
- Yarrow

