



Rabbit Diet

Hay! - The GRASS roots of the diet

Hay is essential for gut and dental health. It should make up the majority of the rabbit's diet. Rabbits should have access to fresh grass hay at all times. They should never run out. Timothy, meadow, orchard, oat, brome, bluegrass and fescue are all great options. Alfalfa is a legume hay, not a grass hay. Providing several varieties helps to build a robust cecal flora which will make your rabbit more resilient to GI upset. Since rabbits are natural foragers, they prefer to eat their hay from the ground as opposed to hay racks and feeders. They also like to have hay piles in several different spots in their space. Consider stuffing small empty boxes with hay and leaving them around their space.

Pellets - Nutritional supplement

- Young Rabbits

Young rabbits require extra nutrients while they're growing. Feed unlimited plain pellets to young rabbits. Begin to limit pellets to ½ cup - 1 cup daily around 9 months.

- Adult Rabbits

1/8 – 1/2 cup of grass hay based pellets daily – plain pellets, no muesli type mixes with colorful treats or seeds. We recommend Oxbow Garden Select, Supreme Science Selective House or Grain Free, Sherwood, and Small Pet Select.

- Senior rabbits

Often as rabbits age, they can have trouble maintaining their weight. When this happens, they will require extra calories to keep them healthy. Consider increasing their normal amount of pellets or switching to a senior alfalfa based formula.

Long hair breeds will also require extra nutrition/pellets to keep them healthy and maintain a normal weight.

Some vets tell people not to feed pellets or to just use them as treats. HRS Chicago does not agree with this because 1) they don't explain fully that each rabbit is individual and some need more nutrition than others 2) if you are only going to feed hay and greens it has to be about 3 different types of hay daily and 8 different types of greens daily (mixed to make a huge salad) to ensure complete nutrition and 3) their weight has to be monitored to make sure as they age they maintain muscle mass. HRS Chicago feels that the best way to ensure complete nutrition is to feed limited amounts of high quality, grass hay based pellet food.



Leafy Greens - Variety is the spice of life!

Rabbits don't eat just one type of green veg in nature so we shouldn't be offering just romaine for them every day. They greatly benefit from multiple types of leafy greens in the diet.

Volume - for adults, feed about 1 cup of greens per 5lbs of bunny

Baby rabbits can start eating salad with mom when they start eating solids, around 3 weeks.

Below are some safe greens for your rabbit :

Spring mix	Broccoli rapini
Arugula	Carrot tops
Basil	Kale
Bok choy	Endive
Fennel	Watercress
Escarole	Beet tops
Endive	Dill
Parsley	Romaine
Cilantro	Green/red leaf lettuce
Dandelion greens	

Note - while dietary calcium does NOT cause stones or sludge like many people believe, we do recommend limiting or omitting spinach from the diet as it is high in oxalates.

It's best to avoid fruit and sugary vegetables(carrots, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, etc) entirely. Rabbits have specialized digestive tracts to allow fermentation to take place for fiber to be digested by bacteria and broken down into absorb-able forms of nutrients. So the fiber that rabbits eat does nothing in the small intestine. It travels to the cecum where fermentation takes place. The bi-products of that digestion are volatile fatty acids. When you feed an appropriate ratio of fiber to carbs, or non-digestible fiber to simple sugars, a certain ratio of volatile fatty acids is produced. When you overfeed fruits in the rabbit a few things happen to the digestive tract. 1) The simple sugars are absorbed in the small intestine and affect appetite/motility hormones, most specifically motilin, which when carbs are overfed is under produced and GI motility is slowed down. 2) the ratio of VFA's produced by the cecum changes, because the population of bacteria changes to favor bacteria that prefer simple sugars. This lowers the pH of the cecum which causes 3) the veriform appendix to overproduce bicarbonate to buffer the cecal contents. Rabbits that are fed too high of carbohydrates have grossly larger appendixes, are more prone to GI stasis, and may become overweight or have problems with excessive cecotropes.



Water from a clean crock/bowl is best for optimum hydration. Never use a bottle for rabbits as they can cause dehydration, stasis, kidney disease, chipped teeth, choking and neck pain.

NOTE: For rabbits that have chronic GI problems, it may be beneficial to completely remove pellets and/or salad from the diet. Some rabbits are sensitive to grains(found in most pellets) and some cannot tolerate any fresh greens. Please consult your veterinarian with any questions about transitioning to modified diets.

NEVER FEED

Potatoes	Millet
Avocado	Nuts/seeds
Chocolate	Bread
Onion/Garlic	Corn
Muesli	Dairy/yogurt drops

BRANDS TO AVOID

Kaytee
Purina
Vitakraft
Small World
Rosewood Naturals