

Feeding Your Pet Rabbit For A Long And Healthy Life.

Owning a rabbit as a pet is increasing in Australia – even in Queensland, where it is illegal to own a rabbit as a pet! The third most popular pet in the USA, rabbits are increasingly “moving into the family room” and becoming part of the household rather than that lonely, isolated life they used to lead in a hutch in the back garden.



Rabbits benefit from care, close contact and companionship, and feeding your bunny well will improve his lifespan, reduce your veterinary bills and make him a better pet.

The rabbit “Food Pyramid”

Just like us, there is a “Food Pyramid for rabbits” from “everyday foods” to “sometimes foods”. Too much calcium in the diet is a real problem in pet rabbits and can cause severe urinary tract problems, resulting in illness and even death.

Base:

High quality **grass** hay is the base, and you bunny should be able to graze this anytime. (Ryegrass, Phalaris, Oats, Brome, or mixed pasture hay all good!)



Too much lucerne can cause calcium issues

Don't use alfalfa hay (lucerne) as an “everyday” food as it can cause calcium problems in the urine, and has too many kilojoules unless your bunny is pregnant, feeding babies or growing rapidly from babyhood to adult.

Don't use straw either – it isn't digested well and isn't a good diet, but it is OK as bedding.

Second level:

Large quantities (as much as your bunny will eat) of high quality *low calcium* vegies are ideal:



Dandelion, Broccoli *flowers and stem*, dark leaf lettuce (NOT iceberg), watercress, Brussels sprouts, celery leaves, cabbage, and endive are good choices, as well as carrots and radishes. The more variety, the better! Not too many carrots, though as they can put too much weight on your bunny.

DO NOT use Turnip greens, broccoli *leaves*, mustard greens, spinach, broccoli or kale daily as these are too high in calcium for general use, but they can be used as treats

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Third level:

Rabbit pellets – buy the best you can afford based on grass hay, not alfalfa (lucerne). You only need to feed enough of these so that your rabbit doesn't get overweight, so a bag of high quality pellets can go a long way.



"Sometimes foods"

Banana slices, raisins, grapes and apple slices are natural, "high sugar" treats that can be given sometimes and are also useful when training. Carrots can also be used as treats, as well as seeds and nuts. ALL of these will put too much weight on your bunny if you treat too often, so take it easy!

Don't forget!



Your bunny's teeth grow all the time, so having safe things to chew on – wood, but not oleander (or other poisonous woods) will stop him using your doors or fences to chew on. Pet Stores stock good quality chewing wood, sometimes flavoured, to keep your bunny happy.

THE FINAL WORD

Individual rabbits have different likes and dislikes, but they must be trained to a balanced diet. Introduce new foods slowly and see how your bunny goes. Some rabbits guts work too slowly if they eat too many veggies (so use more pellets), others do better on less pellets and more grass hay. Work with your bunny so he, and you are happy.

References

Pet-nutrition suite101.com

The House Rabbit Society (www.rabbit.org)

Summary of Calcium in Rabbits, J. E. Harkness (Rabbit Health News 1994: Vol.11, p.7)

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