

# Food for Rabbits

*You are what you eat.* This is a phrase we know, and many of us repeat it to our children. Did you know the same applies to your rabbit?

The number one component in any rabbit's diet should be hay—unlimited amounts of hay. MCRS recommends timothy hay or orchard grass. A rabbit will eat approximately its body size in hay every day. Hay serves several vital functions.

First, it provides the bulk fiber a rabbit needs in its GI tract to keep everything moving the way it should. A rabbit without hay is more prone to GI stasis and other problems.

Second, hay is necessary to help keep a rabbit's teeth in proper form. Since rabbits' teeth grow throughout their lives, they need to chew to keep their teeth filed down. Hay can provide a natural assist in that area.

Greens are a vital part of a rabbit's diet. The questions we hear most often are "Which greens should I give?" and "How much?" Included here is a list of greens that are good for rabbits. We recommend up to two cups a day per 5 pounds of body weight. That doesn't mean two cups of one green; it's better to mix the greens up to equal two cups. Rabbits like variety! When choosing lettuce, be sure to avoid iceberg lettuce, as it has no nutritional value—it's primarily water. For lettuce, we recommend romaine.

Other greens are okay, too, but only in moderation (see **Specific Greens**). The reason is that these greens are high in calcium. Too much calcium can cause sludge in your rabbit's urine. These greens aren't bad for a rabbit, but should be given only in moderation.

When choosing fruits and vegetables, it's important to be sure that no



pesticides or herbicides are present. Be sure to completely wash all fruits and vegetables before giving them to your bunny.

Fresh fruit is a great way to treat your rabbit. However, rabbits have a *huge* sweet tooth! Rabbits, just like children, will eat sweets to the exclusion of everything else that is good for them. A good guide for how much to give is 1 tablespoon fresh, or 1 teaspoon dried fruit maximum per day. If the fruit you are giving your rabbit has seeds (such as grapes, watermelon, oranges, or apples), make sure you either give a seedless variety, or remove the seeds first. The seeds may be tiny to us, but they are choke hazards for rabbits. We've included carrots under treats, which surprises a lot of people. The reason for that is carrots are packed with carbohydrates and sugars—they're not a green vegetable; however, carrot tops are perfectly good for rabbits.

What about pellets? Unfortunately, too often we hear people say that pellets are the primary component of a rabbit's diet. This is incorrect. Pellets have lots of vitamins and minerals that rabbits need, which is good. But just like you wouldn't feed your child nothing but multi-vitamins, you shouldn't give your rabbit only (or primarily) pellets. Nearly every bag of prepackaged rabbit pellets will say to give your rabbit  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of pellets for every 5 pounds of rabbit per day. That is only a *guideline*. If you are supplementing your rabbit's diet with the proper foods like hay and greens, you won't need to give many pellets. It also depends on your rabbit's metabolism: some rabbits have higher metabolisms and need more pellets while other rabbits have very slow metabolisms and need less. The best way to gauge what your rabbit's pellet needs is by its weight. If your rabbit is obese, then you need to cut back on the pellets. If you aren't sure whether your rabbit is at a good weight or not, ask one of us at MCRS or your vet.

Just as it's important to give your rabbit the right kind of greens, it's also important to give your rabbit the right type of pellets. The best type are plain pellets made from timothy that are high in fiber (>18%), low in calcium (<0.9%), low in protein (<14%), and low in fat (<2%). Avoid alfalfa-based pellets, or the varieties that have pieces of cereal, nuts, seeds, yogurt, and dried corn in them. We frequently get questions about why pet food manufacturers package pellets with foods known to be bad for rabbits (such as the cereals, nuts, seeds, and corn). The answer is probably similar to why grocery stores have entire aisles dedicated to candy, chips, and soda.

Rabbits, like people, will have foods they love and foods they do not like. If your rabbit doesn't like one type of vegetable, try another. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, so please contact us if you have any food-related questions.

## Vegetables and Greens

*The recommended amount is up to 2 cups daily (not all one type; assorted is preferred) per 5 pounds of body weight.*

- Basil
- Beet greens (tops)
- Carrot tops
- Celery leaves
- Cilantro
- Clover
- Curly parsley
- Endive
- Escarole
- Grape leaves
- Green peppers
- Mint
- Peppermint leaves
- Radicchio
- Radish tops
- Raspberry leaves
- Romaine lettuce
- Turnip greens
- Watercress

## Specific greens

*These greens should be given sparingly, as they tend to be high in calcium.*

- Bok Choy
- Broccoli
- Brussel sprouts
- Collard greens
- Dandelions (flower & greens)
- Italian parsley
- Kale
- Spinach

## Treats

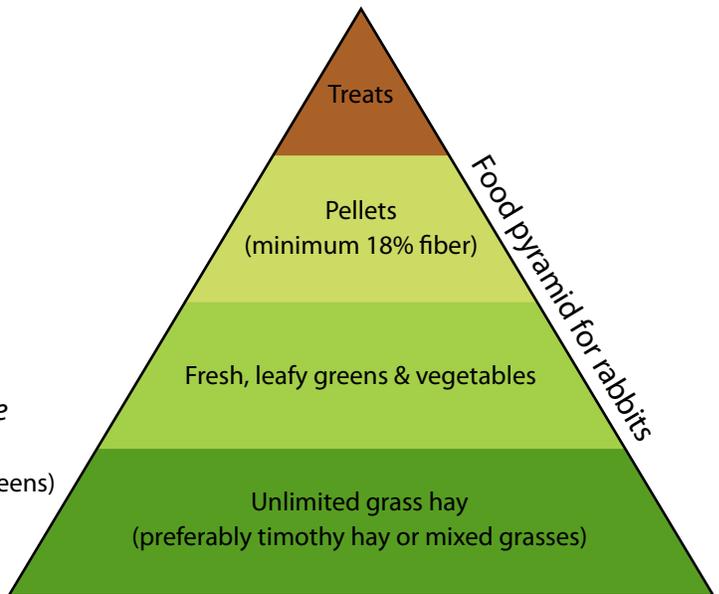
*Fruits should be used only sparingly, as occasional treats. The recommended amount is 1 tablespoon fresh (or 1 teaspoon dried) fruit daily at max.*

- Apple (no stem or seeds)
- Banana
- Blueberries
- Carrots
- Craisins
- Grapes (seedless)
- Melon
- Orange (including peels)
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Raspberries
- Strawberries

## Foods to avoid

*These foods are not good for rabbits for various reasons.*

- Beans
- Corn
- Garlic
- Iceberg lettuce
- Onions
- Peas
- Potatoes
- Rhubarb greens



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The Minnesota Companion Rabbit Society (MCRS) is a volunteer-based, non-profit organization whose primary goals are education and adoption. By educating the public and assisting humane organizations, MCRS works to reduce the number of unwanted rabbits and improve the lives of companion rabbits. Through adoption, MCRS helps rabbits from area shelters and animal control facilities find permanent homes.