

The Ideal Diet for your Rabbits

The following diet is recommended for rabbits:

- At least their own body size in good quality hay each day (it is best to allow constant access to clean, good quality hay that is not part of their bedding)
- A handful of suitable fresh greens morning and evening
- Just a tablespoon of commercial rabbit nuggets once daily (or twice daily if the rabbit weighs over 3.5kg).

Rabbit muesli (a mix of seeds and flakes) should not be fed because it is linked to painful dental disease.

Owners should vary the greens they feed their rabbit. Fruit should only be fed occasionally and in small quantities because it is high in sugar. Sugary treats should also be avoided.

Many of the health problems that vets see with rabbits are caused by their diet. It's extremely important that you give them the right food. Lots of people have become used to feeding rabbits a bowl of rabbit 'muesli'. But these muesli-type mixes are linked to health problems, especially with the teeth.

Does your rabbits' food look like this?



If so, they are more likely to develop painful dental disease.

Greens

Aim to feed a few different greens each day as part of a balanced rabbit diet. The lists below show some greens that are safe to feed, and some that aren't. The list isn't exhaustive. If you're not sure whether you can safely feed a certain plant or vegetable to your rabbit, ask your vet for advice.

Safe

Asparagus
Basil
Broccoli
Brussels Sprouts
Cabbage
Carrots (only feed occasionally – they are high in sugar. The leafy tops are OK)
Cauliflower
Celeriac
Celery leaves
Chard
Chicory

Unsafe

Amaryllis
Bindweed
Bracken
Elder Poppies
Foxglove
Laburnum
Yew
Lily-of-the-valley
Lupin
Most evergreens
Oak leaves
Privet

Courgette
Dandelion (in moderation – can make your rabbit go to the toilet more than usual)
Dock
Endive
Green beans
Kale
Parsley
Radicchio
Radish tops
Rocket
Salad peppers
Spinach
Watercress

Ragwort

You should only give fruit occasionally and in small quantities because it is high in sugar. Apples, grapes, pears, plums and strawberries (including the strawberry leaves) are suitable in small amounts.

Changing a rabbit's diet can upset their digestive system, so always introduce new foods gradually over at least a week, unless your vet advises otherwise.

There are natural treats available from pet shops and pet supermarkets which your rabbits will enjoy and are good for your rabbits' teeth and digestive health. Avoid sugary treats, such as ones made with honey, as these can cause teeth problems and diarrhoea.

Rabbits produce two types of droppings – hard, dry ones which are true faeces, and dark, shiny, smelly ones. These second types are called 'caecotrophs' and rabbits eat them, usually straight from their bottom. This enables them to get the full goodness out of their high-fibre food, so don't be concerned if you see this.

Dental problems

Signs include:

- Going off their food
- Drooling
- A wet chin
- Weight loss
- Discharge from the eye
- Dirty bottom

An eye discharge can develop because the abnormal tooth roots can affect the eyes, and the bottom can become dirty because the sore mouth makes licking and grooming too painful for affected rabbits.

Visit your vet if any of your rabbits show any of these signs.

There can be other causes of overgrown teeth (e.g. if the teeth don't meet properly because of a mouth injury) but the commonest cause is being fed rabbit 'muesli' and not enough hay or grass.

Water

Fresh water must always be available. A suitable water bottle with a metal spout is a good way to provide water. Check your rabbits are using the bottle as some rabbits may be used to drinking from a bowl and may not change very easily. Whether using a bottle or a bowl, keep them clean at all times.

The amount of water a rabbit drinks can vary quite a lot – from 50 to 150ml per kg body weight per day depending on the temperature and what the rabbit has eaten.

If any of your rabbits start to drink significantly more or less than usual, this can be a sign of a medical problem so you should make an appointment to see your vet.