

Fresh Foods For Rabbits

Select the freshest foods for your rabbit. There are a number of ways to determine how fresh fruits and vegetables can be for your rabbit.

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Imagine the freshest, tastiest salad you have eaten. The greens were crisp and light. The vegetables were young and therefore full of flavor and nutrition. Everything was thoroughly washed giving the salad a fresh, clean and delicious taste.

The same freshness principles should apply when selecting the perfect vegetables for your pet rabbit (minus the dressing and cheese, of course; rabbits should only eat plain, raw vegetables). Picking and storing vegetables so that they stay their freshest is the first step to ensuring a healthy diet for your rabbit.

Good veggies for rabbits include romaine lettuce, parsley, cilantro, leafy green and red lettuce, and endive, according to Roxanne Jones of Roxanne's Rabbit Rescue, Inc., in Florida. "Parsley is good for their stomach, and cilantro is good for the immune system," she said. She did not recommend iceberg lettuce, because it lacks the nutritional value of darker greens. Cabbage sometimes causes severe gas for rabbits, she added.

To promote good stomach health and to treat diarrhea, Jones also gives rabbits organic sweet potatoes. (A complete list of healthy fruits and vegetables for rabbits is available on the House Rabbit Society website.)

Look For Color

Freshness begins away from home, when you are at the store selecting food for your bunny. Again, think about what looks appetizing to you. "Always look for greens that are crisp to the touch and look fresh," said Judith Pierce, president/chapter manager of the San Diego House Rabbit Society. "If they have a lot of spots on them, are yellow or slightly wilted, pass them by. They will go bad quickly in your refrigerator." Pierce added that a local farmer's market provides a good venue in which to find "some of the freshest, most appealing greens for your rabbit — for a good price."

Susan Smith, professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and educator/fosterer for the Wisconsin House Rabbit Society, echoes this opinion on fresh foods for rabbits. "Locally grown food is fresher, younger and higher in nutrient density," she said, adding that fresh, water-dense vegetables are the best choices for rabbits.

A rabbit not receiving pellets should have access to seven to 10 different vegetables per day, according to Smith. Rabbits eating a pelleted diet should receive five to seven vegetables per day. Because they can cause gut overload, starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, squashes, peas and most root vegetables) should be avoided, Smith advised.

Rabbit experts agree that the quantity of vegetables and greens per serving depends largely on an individual rabbit's dietary needs. Jones starts rabbits on a small bowlful of veggies. "Too many may give poopy butt," she explained.

Smith leaves veggies in her rabbits' dishes overnight and by morning the bowl is usually empty. Any remaining dried or discolored greens from the night before should be thrown out in the morning and fresh veggies added.

Similarly, Pierce gives rabbits plenty of time to eat their vegetables. "Many bunnies are leisurely eaters and like to take their time," she said. "I like to give them plenty of time to finish their meal — several hours certainly — so they continue to get a well-rounded diet, no matter how long it takes them to finish." She noted, however, that if a vegetable starts to turn bad or looks less than fresh, you should immediately remove it.