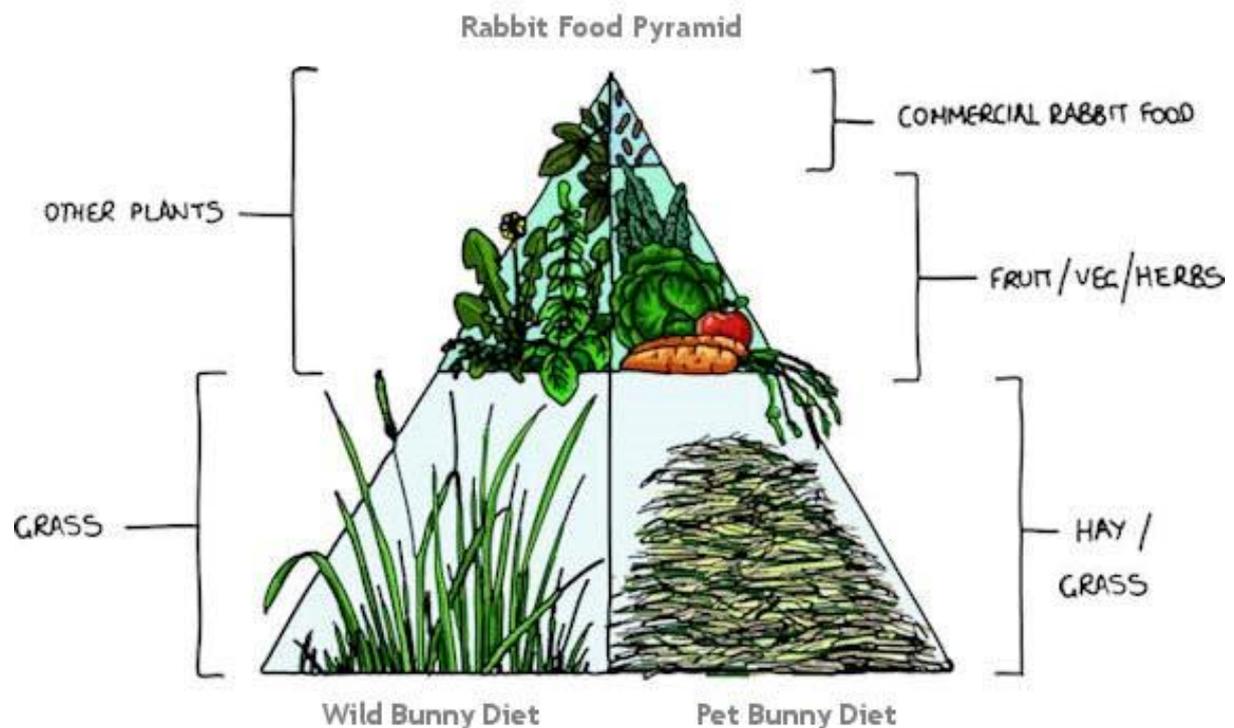


Feeding your rabbit

One of the most important things you can do for your rabbit is to ensure that you are feeding the correct diet, as most common health problems in rabbits such as dental disease and obesity are caused by an incorrect diet.

Domestic rabbits are very closely related to their wild cousins whose diet consists solely of grass and wild plants. The digestive tract of a domesticated rabbit is identical to that of a wild rabbit, and they therefore should have a diet that closely mimics the diet they would have if they were wild.

Here are the proportions ...



The importance of fibre

Unlike humans, rabbits' teeth grow continually throughout its life. If a rabbit does not have enough fibre in its diet then the teeth do not wear down correctly which can lead to overgrowth or the development of sharp edges called **spurs**. These can rub on the rabbit's cheeks and tongue causing discomfort and stop your rabbit from eating. Fibre also plays an important role in maintaining a healthy digestive tract.

For these reasons a **rabbit's diet should be high in fibre**. In the wild, rabbits graze almost continually, with the majority of their diet consisting of grass - a pet rabbit's diet should mimic this as closely as possible. This means that a rabbit should have constant access to hay and/or grass **making up at least 80% of the rabbit's diet**.

Commercial rabbit foods

In the past commercial rabbit foods often made up the majority of a pet rabbit's diet, but this rarely met with the rabbit's nutritional needs and as such lead to health problems. However, over recent years, commercial rabbit foods have come a long way and whilst they still should not make up the majority of a rabbit's diet, in small quantities they are a useful supplement to your bunny's' diet.

Commercial rabbit diets fall into one of two groups:

- **Muesli diets:** These are diets which consist of a mixture of pellets and grains. They are readily available, often being sold loose in pet shops, and usually inexpensive.
- **Extruded pellets:** These diets are produced by mixing all of the constituent ingredients to produce pellets.



Whilst **muesli** diets often look more appetising, they allow the rabbit to be *selective* (in other words pick out) about which parts of the diet they will eat which can cause nutritional imbalances and lead to health problems.

The most palatable elements of muesli type diets are usually flaked peas and maize, both of which have low calcium to phosphorus ratio. These low calcium levels lead to demineralisation of the bones and teeth, and in turn dental disease. Most muesli type diets are also low in fibre, so even if the rabbit does eat all of the food, it is still unlikely to meet its nutritional requirements if not fed with adequate quantities of hay and/or grass as well.

Extruded diets are produced by mixing all of the ingredients together to produce pellets. As all of the ingredients are contained within the pellets it is impossible for the rabbit to selectively feed on some elements and therefore receive an imbalanced diet. Although they can appear more expensive, as extruded diets prevent selective feeding and wastage they are usually a more cost effective way to feed rabbits - as well as being much better for them.

A commercial rabbit food should only make up a very small proportion of your rabbit's diet – only around **5%**. This equates to giving a **maximum of 25g per kg bodyweight per day**. This means the average adult lop rabbit should have only **50g (approximately two egg cups)** of rabbit food per day.

Leafy greens and vegetables

The remaining **15%** of your rabbit's diet should be made up of small portions of a variety of vegetables. This roughly equates to a portion roughly the size of the rabbits head twice daily. Green vegetables and plants which grow on the surface rather than



below the soil are best - for example, carrot tops are much better for rabbits than the carrot itself. A lot of rabbits also enjoy herbs, although it may take some a while to get used to them due to their strong taste. Whilst rabbits often enjoy them, fruits and some vegetables are very high in sugars which can lead to weight gain and should only be given in moderation as treats.

Treats

There are a large variety of treats available in pet shops for rabbits, such as chocolate drops and popcorn sticks. There are, however, much better, more natural alternatives. Fruits and vegetables such as carrots and parsnips which are too high in sugar to be fed daily are often enjoyed by rabbits as a treat, but should only be given in moderation as they can otherwise cause weight gain. A couple of tablespoons once or twice a week are plenty.

Making changes to your rabbit's diet

It is very important not to make any sudden changes to your rabbit's diet as abrupt changes can cause fatal digestive upsets. This is because rabbits use bacteria in their gut to help digest their food and sudden changes to their diet can disrupt the balance of these bacteria leading to serious problems.

Therefore a change in diet should be done gradually over the course of at least two weeks, gradually decreasing the amount of your rabbit's previous diet whilst slowly increasing the quantity of the new diet. When first trying a new green food, give a small portion – a single leaf will be enough and make sure that your rabbit tolerates this before adding any other new foods. If your rabbit has never eaten greens, switching to a diet of mainly hay and greens may take a couple of months.

What plants can I feed my rabbit?

There are a wide variety of vegetables, plants and fruits which can be safely given to rabbits, although some should only be given as a treat. Rabbits are very sensitive to chemicals, so all fresh food should be thoroughly washed before it is fed and if you are picking wild plants ensure that you are able to correctly identify them so that you do not accidentally poison your rabbit.

The lists below give details of some of the foods you can safely feed your rabbit:

Vegetables

- Asparagus
- Baby sweetcorn, but only as an occasional treat
- Beetroot, but not the leafy tops
- Broccoli
- Brussel Sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots and their tops, but only give carrots as an occasional treat as they are high in sugars
- Cauliflower
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Chicory
- Courgette
- Cucumber
- Curly kale



- Fennel
- Green beans
- Parsnip, but only as an occasional treat
- Peas, including the leaves and pods
- Peppers
- Pumpkin
- Radish tops
- Rocket
- Spinach
- Spring greens
- Squash
- Swede
- Turnip
- Watercress

Herbs

- Basil
- Coriander
- Dill
- Mint
- Parsley
- Oregano
- Rosemary



Fruits

- Apple
- Apricot
- Banana
- Blackberries, including the leaves
- Cherries
- Grapes
- Kiwi fruit
- Mango
- Melon
- Nectarines
- Oranges, but not the peel
- Papaya
- Peaches
- Pears
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Raspberries, including the leaves
- Strawberries, including the leaves
- Tomatoes, but not the leaves

Wildflowers and Herbs

- Borage
- Calendula
- Chamomile
- Chickweed
- Coltsfoot
- Comfrey

- Dandelions
- Goose grass, but it may stick to the coat
- Lavender
- Mallow
- Nettles
- Nasturtium
- Shepherds purse
- Sow thistle



Poisonous Plants

Although many plants are reputedly toxic to rabbits, reports of poisoned bunnies are thankfully extremely rare. This list of poisonous plants below isn't definitive, but it will give you some idea of the plants to keep your rabbit away from.

Poisonous plants

- All plants which grown from bulbs
- Amaryllis
- Arum lilies
- Bindweed
- Bracken
- Bryony
- Buttercups
- Christmas rose
- Deadly nightshade
- Delphinium
- Elder
- Fools parsley
- Foxglove
- Hemlock
- Henbane
- Lily of the valley
- Lupin
- Laburnum
- Most evergreens
- Oak leaves
- Poppies
- Potato tops
- Privet
- Ragwort
- Rhubarb leaves
- Scarlet runner
- Toadflax
- Woody nightshade
- Yew



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