

Feeding rabbits

Rabbits evolved to eat grass and ground plants. So, the vast majority of their diet should be *ad lib* **grass and/or hay** (meadow or timothy hay) with some **green, leafy veg**, for example:

Shop bought: Broccoli, cabbage, chicory, chard, parsley, watercress, celery leaves, endive, radicchio, pak choi, dock, basil, kale, carrot tops, beet top, lettuce, rocket.

Wild picked: Bramble, dandelion, chickweed, plantain, sunflower, wild strawberry, dock, yarrow.



Pelleted or extruded diets are convenient but generally not necessary. They can be helpful for pregnant or lactating does or fast growing youngsters, and sick rabbits that are off their food. They should certainly not be fed *ad lib*, and for healthy adults the amount fed should be kept below a maximum of 25 grams per kg of body weight day. Overfeeding such 'concentrate' diets contributes to gut disease, dental disease, obesity (which can lead to other health problems such as arthritis and fly strike) and boredom. Always avoid sudden changes in diet.



What not to feed: There is no law saying that something sold as 'rabbit food' has to be good for rabbits! Avoid feeding the following:



- Mixed rabbit feeds. Rabbits may pick out and eat the bits they like, not the bits that are good for them, often leading to health problems.
- High fat or high carbohydrate starchy treats. This includes honey sticks, beans, peas, corn, bread, breakfast cereal, biscuits, nuts, seeds, crisps and chocolate.
- Lawnmower clippings, because they ferment rapidly.

For treats: Treats should be fed only in limited amounts. Best are commercial hay treats, or favourite herbs or greens. Fruit and root vegetables are also acceptable.

Water: Rabbits need plenty of fresh water as they drink relatively more than many other animals - about 100 ml per kg of body weight per day.

Faeces: Rabbits have two types of faeces – the hard, round 'bumbles' they pass in the day, and softer 'caecotrophs' passed at night and eaten straight from the anus. It is normal and necessary for their health that rabbits eat their caecotrophs.

A rabbit who has not eaten or passed faeces for 24 hours should be seen by a vet.

