

Rabbit Feed Information

<http://www.crossroadsrabbitry.com/rabbit-feed-information/>



Before getting into feed information, it should be noted how important water is to a rabbit. A rabbit will normally consume twice as much water as it will feed. Rabbits eating dry food in warm weather will drink 10-20 oz. of water per day. On extremely hot and humid days, a rabbit may consume 4 times as much water as it will feed. Let's just say "**Water is the single most important nutrient to a rabbit.**"

Rabbits must have water to control their body temperature. Water provides a solvent for digestions, transports nutrients and waste and also helps lubricate joints. Water deficiency will cause poor growth and lactation, so be sure to always provide unlimited

amounts of clean, fresh water to your rabbits.

After water, a good quality rabbit feed is just as important. When determining a brand to use, try to find a high quality pellet feed that contains 14-18% crude protein, 18-24% crude fiber and 10-12% ash. It should also contain calcium, phosphorus and vitamins. It should contain no more than 3% crude fat and no more than 1% calcium. Use a reputable source that has been supplying rabbit feed for many years. When purchasing feed, make sure that it is fresh. The label on the feed sack should have the date the feed was milled.

Three month old feed, in our opinion, is old feed! Try not to use any feed that is more than one month old. How much to feed your rabbit is important. If you give your rabbit too much feed it may become too fat, may develop health problems, be hard to breed and have difficulties when kindling.

An overweight doe will not be as receptive to the male, nor will she get pregnant. The fat deposits become a physical barrier that keeps the kits from being conceived. On the other side, if you feed them too little, then they will, obviously, become too skinny and be more prone to other diseases plus will not produce as well or be good mothers.

We make sure our feed is delivered weekly to insure its freshness.

On average, a rabbit will eat approximately one fluid ounce of feed per pound of weight each day. There are 8 fluid ounces in one cup. So, a four pound rabbit will eat about 4oz. or 1/2 cup of feed per day. An eight pound rabbit will eat approximately 8oz. or 1 cup. Below is a good average of the amount of feed you should give your rabbit.

Remember though, each rabbit is an individual and may have different eating habits. These are merely guidelines and based on our experiences and our rabbits. You should observe and learn your rabbit's needs, and adjust its feed accordingly. These are approximate daily amounts. The first amount is for medium breeds, and the second amount is for large breeds like the NZW.

- Bucks: (Med Breed) = 3 to 6oz. (Large Breed) = 6 to 8oz.
- Does: (Med) = 4 to 6oz. (Large) = 8 to 9oz.
- Does (when bred and between 1-15 days): (Med) = 6oz. (Large) = 9oz.
- Does (when bred and between 16-30 days): (Med) = 7 to 8oz. (Large) = 10 to 11oz.
- Doe (with a litter of 6-8 kits / 1 week old): (Med) = 9 to 10oz. (Large) = 12 to 13oz.
- Doe (with a litter of 6-8 kits / 1 month old): (Med) = 18oz. (Large) = 24 to 30oz.
- Doe (with a litter of 6-8 kits / 6-8 weeks old): (Med) = 28oz. (Large) = 36oz to full feed.
- Doe (after litter is weaned): (Med) = 4 to 6oz. (Large) = 8 to 9oz.

- A young and weaned rabbit: (Med) = 3 to 6oz. (Large) = 6 to 9oz.

The best way to tell if your feeding your rabbit the correct amount is to stroke its backbone regularly. If the bumps of your rabbit's backbone or spine feel sharp, pointed or jagged, you should increase its feed; if you can feel the bumps, but they feel rounded, you are giving the right amount; if no bumps are felt at all, then you should decrease your rabbit's feed intake.

On average, a weaning (nzw) rabbit will gain approximately 1 pound for every 3.25 to 3.5 pounds of feed consumed. So, they will consume approximately 15 to 18 lbs. of feed to reach a weight of 5lbs. Also as an average, you can expect the doe and her litter together, up to the market delivery date, to consume 3.5 to 4 pounds of feed per pound of the total litter's weight gain.

Remember that these are approximate figures based on the NZW rabbit and our feed used at Crossroads Rabbitry. Your figures and calculations may come up differently depending on the type of feed used, genetics, management, climate etc. You can use these example numbers to help figure up your approximate cost that it takes to get your kits to fryer weight.

For example; If a 50lb. bag of feed is \$12.00 then a pound of feed in this bag costs 24 cents (\$12.00 divided by 50lbs). If it takes approximately 16 lbs. of feed to get a NZW fryer to 5 lbs. then 24 cents x 16lbs = \$3.84. This is the approximate dollar amount you would have invested in feed for this 5lb. fryer. If your fryers reach 5 lbs. in 60 days you can figure up your approximate daily feed cost. For example; the \$3.84 total feed cost for the fryer is divided by 60 days = 6 cents per day you are spending on feeding that fryer to get it to the market or the dinner table.

To figure up the approximate amount spent on the rabbit for each lb. gained you would divide this \$3.84 by 5lbs = 76 cents in feed costs being paid per lb. gained by the rabbit. Remember though the first two weeks the kits are nursing and not yet on pellets so again, these are approximate figures.

There are many factors which will affect food intake by a rabbit

- **Water Availability:** As noted above, rabbits must have a unlimited supply of fresh and clean water at all times. The importance of adequate water intake cannot be overstated. Water is present in every tissue of their body and it accumulates for over 70% of their total body weight. Restricting the water intake will reduce their food intake. Lactation will also increase the water requirement of a rabbit by 3 times. The lack of water will lead to poor milk production and could account for the loss of young litters.
- **Health:** One of the first signs of illnesses in a rabbit is a decrease in its food intake. Occasionally when the diet is not well balanced the rabbit will have a depraved appetite. Try to monitor your rabbits health at all times.
- **Temperature:** Feed intake will decline with increased temperatures; rabbits tend to take advantage of the cooler night hours to eat. Keeping your building 10 degrees cooler inside than outside will help increase food intake.
- **Pregnancy and Lactation:** Pregnancy and lactation will stimulate a rabbits food intake.
- **Food Quality:** Rabbits can only eat more food if the food passes quickly through the digestive system. The higher the quality of the food the more will be eaten. Be very selective in choosing a good feed.
- **Condition of Food:** Freshness is important. Stale or damp food will reduce intake, especially if it is contaminated with urine and droppings. The feed needs to be fresh at all times.



We only use 11.5" Fine-X feeders. We make sure the kits have a meal in front of them at all times.

At Crossroads Rabbitry, we give our does 8 to 9oz. per day and give our bucks 6 to 7oz. We want our bucks slim and trim for breeding. The better stamina the bucks have, the less time you spend breeding. However, when it's breeding time we do give our bucks 1 to 2oz. of oats which helps them with their energy level.

Don't feed more oats than this to your bucks, as oats can put on excessive weight. We feed our rabbits in the evening and have very little wasted feed; rabbits fed in the morning tend to play with their food, spilling it, and

then wanting more. This is wasted cost. When fed in the evening, they usually eat all their food and then just relax during the day. Regardless of when you feed your rabbits, stay on a strict routine. Feed them the same time each and every day.



We use laminate cards to tell us what is in the cage; under 4.75 lbs., market weight, over weight, culls etc. We also give our does a 1/2 piece of berry flavored tums just before kindling. This helps with their calcium level as it drops when giving birth. After kindling, we give her 0.5-1oz. of calf mana or milk plus each day to help with her milk and needed vitamins.



Do not feed a rabbit more than one day's supply of feed at a time unless you'll be gone the next day. If you allow your does to get fat, they will not breed as easily, have a much higher risk of dying and the conception rate may be lower.

They just do better overall if not overweight. We do, however, increase our does feed once she has given birth for a little extra needed energy and milk production. On the other hand; do not try to save money and under feed your rabbits. The survival instincts will kick in and if the doe feels she is not getting enough feed to survive herself, she is not going to take care of her young.

The same goes for the bucks, if you feed them too little they have less energy and are not as interested in breeding or just don't have the stamina. If the bucks aren't breeding and the does aren't taking care of their young because of being under fed, have you really saved any money? Stick to the safe amount as noted above and they'll do much better.



We go thru a lot of hay for building nests and to help prevent health problems such as hair balls, diarrhea, and obesity.

Due to the makeup of a rabbit's intestinal tract and colon, they need a high percentage of fiber or roughage. Providing a grass hay to your rabbits will help prevent health problems such as hair balls, diarrhea, and obesity. It will also encourage chewing for long periods of time for healthy teeth.

Hay may be the single most important item in your rabbit's diet, and it should be fed in unlimited quantities to both adults and baby rabbits.

We supplement our rabbit's diet with Bermuda hay which seems to be their favorite. Bermuda hay, however, can be difficult to find at times. Other types of hay good for a rabbit may include Timothy, Oaten, Orchard, Bluegrass, Coastal, Brome, Bahia, Wheaten, Pasture, Paddock, Meadow or Rye grass. Your choice of hay should include Vitamin A and D as well as calcium, protein and other nutrients. Alfalfa, Lucerne or Clover hays, on the other hand, should not be given to adult rabbits. These three hays are actually legumes and are too high in protein, calcium and calories. These minerals are very rich and can cause health problems like obesity, bladder stones and can cause "sludge" in a rabbit's urine. Alfalfa hay, however, is great for young or growing rabbits.



If you do decide you want to make a change in the rabbit's diet, do it slowly. Serious damage or even death may result if certain foods are fed to a rabbit that is accustomed to only eating concentrated feed. Even sudden changes in a grain diet may cause minor, or possibly serious, digestive disorders. **Any changes you make, should be done gradually.** The best method is mixed feeding to avoid any sudden change. Never feed them lettuce (especially ice-berg) or cabbage. Lettuce contains lactucarium, which will upset the balance of good bacteria in their stomach and cause them to get diarrhea so badly that it can become fatal. The best and safest thing to do is just stick with rabbit pellets. Rabbits are fine and content with eating the same thing every

day. Their health is more important than you feeling good about giving it a special treat. That special treat could be deadly. However, there are treats safe for rabbits if given in small amounts (see below).

We use 80 ounce feeders with screen bottoms. We use the largest size feeders available for our growout rabbits and many of these have homemade extensions to make sure feeding only has to be done once a day. This way when the kits begin eating we can pour the feed to them. We make sure they always have a meal in front of them at all times. You want them gaining weight as fast as possible. Make sure to keep your feeders clean and rid of any rabbit waste.

TREATS OK TO FEED A RABBIT: (Feed fruits and vegetables in small amounts as they are high in sugar and starch.) **A safe amount of fruit to feed your rabbit is 1 teaspoon per 2 lbs of body weight daily.** All of the following are considered treats, and should be fed in very limited quantities. **Remove any seeds or pits from fruits or vegetables** and be advised that overfeeding a rabbit may cause intestinal problems and cause the rabbit to desire treats instead of its normal healthy food. Be sure to wash the treat thoroughly to remove any pesticide and fertilizer residues.

- Apple
- Apricot

- Banana
- Basil
- Beet greens (top)
- Bell peppers (any color/very little)
- Blackberry leaves
- Blueberries
- Broccoli
- Bok choy
- Borage leaves
- Cantaloupe
- Carrot tops (very little)
- Cherries (not the pits)
- Cilantro
- Clover
- Collard greens
- Culantro
- Dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides)
- Dill leaves
- Endive
- Escarole
- Fennel (the leafy tops as well as the base)
- Grapes
- Green peppers
- Honeydew
- Kale (very little /only feed once a week)
- Kiwi
- Mango
- Mint
- Mustard greens
- Nectarine
- Papaya
- Parsley
- Peaches
- Pea pods (the flat edible kind)
- Pears
- Peppermint leaves
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Potato peelings
- Radicchio
- Radish tops
- Raspberries
- Raspberry leaves
- Spinach (very little /only feed once a week)
- Strawberries
- Summer squash
- Sunflower seeds
- Swiss chard
- Turnip greens
- Watercress (very little /only feed once a week)
- Watermelon
- Wheat grass
- Yu choy
- Zucchini squash

COMMON FOODS TO AVOID: (Never feed a rabbit any meat.) Many types of seeds are indigestible to a rabbit, and can cause intestinal impactions or blockages. Some seeds are safe but it may be better to avoid them all. Never feed your rabbit any commercial gourmet or treat mixes filled with dried fruit, nuts or seeds.

- Beans
- Breads
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Cereals
- Chocolate
- Cookies
- Corn
- Cucumber
- Feed Turnips
- Iceberg Lettuce (NO light – colored lettuce)
- Nuts
- Parsnips
- Peas
- Red Clover
- Seeds
- Sugar
- Sweets
- Potato tops
- Tomato leaves

NOTE: The authors and operators at Crossroads Rabbitry are not veterinarians. We are not qualified to give official veterinary advice. The following information is drawn from our experiences and research, but is not guaranteed. Please consult a qualified veterinarian before giving any fruit, vegetable or treat to your rabbit.