



# Rabbit diet

The right diet is essential to rabbits' emotional happiness. Their foraging behaviour helps to keep them busy, stimulated and exercised.

Good quality hay and/or grass should make up the majority of your rabbits' diet and should be available at all times. Hiding hay, grass and healthy high-fibre snacks around your rabbits' home and exercise areas provides a great way to promote foraging behaviour. Rabbits are very intelligent and the challenge of searching for some of their food provides them with lots of mental stimulation.

Apart from mental stimulation and emotional wellbeing, eating all that high fibre food has many other benefits for rabbits. We describe rabbits as 'fibrevores' because fibre is absolutely essential for their dental and digestive health.

## Feed your rabbits plenty of fibre

Rabbits need two kinds of fibre in their diet; digestible and indigestible. The first gives them essential nutrients and the second keeps their digestive system moving effectively.

- Indigestible fibre passes through their digestive system and is excreted as separate, round, hard droppings. This process keeps the digestive system moving and stimulates their appetite
- Digestible fibre is moved up into an organ called the caecum, which is like a giant appendix. Good bacteria in the caecum ferment the fibre, making it easy to digest, which then emerges in the form of clumps of sticky droppings called caecotrophs. Rabbits then re-eat the caecotrophs and their systems extract essential nutrition as the digestible fibre passes through for the second time

Failing to provide adequate portions of the right kind of fibre can rapidly lead to illness, which can sometimes be fatal.

## Avoid muesli-style foods

Muesli-style foods can be very bad for rabbits. As they're fussy eaters with a very sweet tooth, some rabbits will

pick out the tastier elements of muesli-style foods, usually those that are higher in sugar or starch, and leave the rest. This is called selective feeding and will inevitably lead to an imbalanced diet lacking in calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D. Above all, if lots of additional hay and grass are not provided, this behaviour can result in a lack of dietary fibre with potentially fatal consequences.

## Provide rabbits a simple feeding plan

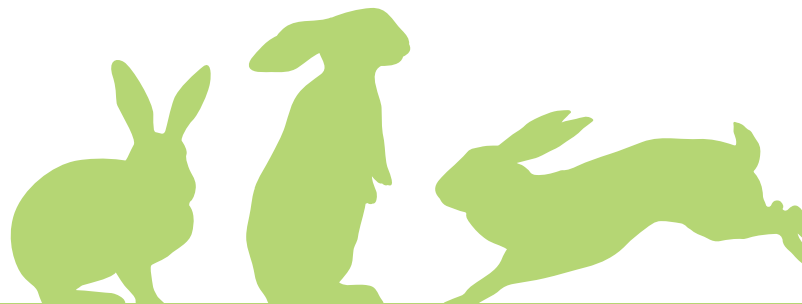
**A complete nugget diet** – (i.e. not a muesli-type diet) that is high in 'beneficial fibre' for digestive health and have added vitamins, minerals and prebiotics

### Hay and grass

**Snacks** – provide snacks that are specifically designed for rabbits. This promotes emotional health by preventing boredom and encourages bonding and interaction between you and your pets

**Fresh greens** – rabbits should be fed fresh greens to give additional nutrients and to provide variety. But you need to be careful about what you feed them and how much. Keep quantities small – about a teacup a day of fresh greens is enough for an adult Netherland Dwarf rabbit. Substantially more is needed for large/giant breeds. Some of these foods can be too 'rich' for rabbits if fed in large volumes, the result being diarrhoea. So, small amounts and a mix of different varieties is best. Be aware that not all fruit, vegetables and greenery are good for rabbits – kale, spinach and savoy cabbage are good greens to feed. Root vegetables like carrots or fruit are very high in sugar and starch, so should only be given in very small amounts as an occasional treat

**Fresh water** – a plentiful supply of fresh, clean water must always be available



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