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# RABBIT DIET: A COMPLETE GUIDE ON WHAT TO FEED YOUR BUNNY



Bunny eating a treat

Rabbits are complicated critters and need a complicated diet to keep their little bodies healthy. While it's obvious to just feed a dog dog food, feeding a bunny only commercial rabbit pellets can give them serious health problems.

## Hay

The most important food your bunny needs is unlimited access to hay. Hay should make up 80 to 90 percent of your rabbit's diet, and it's crucial for preventing [GI Stasis](#), as well as wearing your rabbit's teeth down. Your bunny should be eating a pile of hay as big as them every day! Without access to hay, bunnies are at serious risk of potentially fatal illness and painful, overgrown teeth.

## Alfalfa

Baby bunnies should be given alfalfa hay. It's higher in calcium, protein, and calories than grass hay, so is perfect for their little growing bodies. You'll want to start phasing out of alfalfa hay once your bunny is [seven months](#) old, though if you have a smaller breed that has already finished growing at four to five months, you may want to start the switch sooner.

Many sources recommend mixing the [alfalfa with grass hay](#) to keep your baby bunny from becoming a picky eater. Alfalfa hay is richer and tastes better to most rabbits than grass hays, so a rabbit that's been raised on purely alfalfa may turn their nose up when it's time to make the change. I definitely wish I had done this! After feeding my baby bunnies only alfalfa, it took me trying five different types of grass hays over three months to get them to eat anything else.

If you choose not to mix grass hay into your baby bunny's alfalfa, you'll want to make a gradual switch and add lots of alfalfa to their new hay. This will help them learn to eat the grass hay, as well as prevent their delicate gut bacteria from being upset by a sudden change.

Once your bunny has turned one, they should be weaned off alfalfa and eating mainly grass hay. Continuing to free feed alfalfa to an adult can cause weight gain and bladder stones. You can, however, mix small amounts (less than a 20 percent) of alfalfa into your bun's hay to encourage them to eat more. If you have a malnourished bunny or a senior bun who's not eating enough, you can also feed alfalfa to help them put on some weight (consult your vet first).

## Timothy hay

The most popular choice is second cut Timothy, as it's high in fiber and deliciously leafy with soft stems. Most of the bunnies at Save a Bun Rabbit Rescue refuse to eat anything but second cut Timothy!

First cut Timothy is higher in fiber than second cut, so is an excellent choice for bunnies with a history of GI stasis. However, because the stalks are much thicker than second cut hay, many bunnies may refuse to eat it.

If you have a very picky eater on your hands who turns their snout up at even the freshest hay, third cut Timothy may be the way to go. It's even softer and leafier than the second cut, so will help tempt your persnickety bun. However, it's lower in fiber and higher in protein than second cut Timothy, so you'll likely want to mix other kinds of hay into it and supplement with a high fiber pellet.

Other types of hay, like orchard grass and meadow hay, also come in different cuttings. However, unless you're buying straight from a farm, it's hard to find suppliers who will let you choose the cutting. In general, the thicker the hay stalks, the higher the fiber, and the greener and softer the hay, the higher the protein, calcium, and calories.

## Oat hay

Oat hay is a great option for bunnies who don't like Timothy hay or for people who have hay allergies. It has high fiber stems and [optimal protein levels](#) and caloric density, making it a healthy option for your bun. With its sweet and nutty flavor, it's almost always popular among rabbits, and it's my three bunnies' favorite. It's also a wonderful hay to mix into your bunny's Timothy to help prevent food boredom and encourage good [eating habits](#).

## Orchard grass hay

Orchard grass is another good choice for rabbits who refuse to eat Timothy or for people with allergies. Many bunnies love its sweet flavor, and, like oat hay, it's perfect for mixing into your bunny's Timothy to keep things interesting. While it's [higher in protein](#) and calories than Timothy, it still has plenty of fiber and optimal calcium levels.

## Meadow hay

Meadow hay is softer and leafier than Timothy, and often includes bits of flowers which can be a tasty treat for your bun and provide some foraging fun. It's high in fiber and great to mix into your bunny's Timothy for food variety. However, finding meadow hay that's consistent in flavor isn't easy, so if your bun is very picky, they might turn up their floofer snoofer if a certain batch isn't to their liking.

## What to look for in a hay

The most important factor when choosing your hay is long stems. Steer clear of dusty hay that resembles bags of certain illegal powdered substances more than fresh, delicious dried grass. Overly dusty hay often means mold, and without the long hay strands, your bun isn't getting enough fiber or chomping action to wear down their teeth.

Be cautious when buying hay in a plastic bag. The plastic prevents the hay from getting any air circulation, which can make it taste stale to your bun and can also cause mold. If possible, try to buy bales or hay packaged in a cardboard box.

Also, make sure your hay has some green color to it. Hay that's completely brown or yellow has been bleached by the sun and is devoid of nutritional value.

Lastly, avoid those "premium" bags of hay mixed with chunks of dried fruit. Sprinkling small amounts of healthy treats or pellets into your bunny's hay is a good way to encourage them to eat more, but dried fruit is very concentrated in sugar, and a rabbit-sized pile of this fancy hay often contains way more than the allotted 1 tsp per 4 lbs body weight.

# Greens

Bunnies need a daily supply of fresh, leafy greens to provide them with enough vitamins and calories, and to help keep them hydrated. Aim to feed around [1 or 2 cups of greens per 4 lbs](#) of body weight. Always thoroughly wash your rabbit's greens, and, if you can, provide organic. I've never worried about eating organic food myself, but my 5 lb rabbit eating as many veggies as me, a 120 lb human, definitely makes me want to minimize how many pesticides are on her greens.

You can begin feeding leafy greens to your bunny at four months old. Introduce one kind at a time so you don't upset their delicate digestive systems, and gradually increase over a few months until they're at their goal amount.

Try to feed your bunny at least three different kinds of veggies every day to ensure a well-rounded diet. Just like it's good for humans to eat a variety of different foods, it's important for bunnies too! Some greens are high in oxalates and can cause [bladder stones](#) or sludge, as well as [kidney or other health problems](#). These veggies should only make up one of the three.

### Bunny Safe Veggies (low in oxalates)

1. Arugula
2. Basil
3. Bok choy
4. Carrot tops
5. Chicory
6. Cilantro
7. Collard greens
8. Dandelion greens
9. Dill
10. Escarole
11. Endive
12. Fennel
13. Kale\*
14. Lettuce (any kind but iceberg)
15. Mint
16. Okra leaves
17. Radicchio
18. Watercress
19. Wheatgrass
20. Yu choy
21. Zucchini leaves

### Bunny Safe Veggies High in Oxalates (only feed one a day)

1. Mustard greens
2. Parsley
3. Radish tops
4. Spinach
5. Sprouts (alfalfa, clover, broccoli, etc.)
6. Swiss chard

\*Whether or not kale is high in oxalates is somewhat of a [controversial topic](#).

Rabbits can also have small amounts of clover, but too much can [give them gas](#).

## Pellets

A good pellet should be *at least* 18 percent fiber, but the higher the better. Timothy-based pellets often run as high as 29 percent fiber and are a good choice for helping to prevent health issues like GI stasis. Generally, you'll want the protein level to be between 12-14 percent, but baby bunnies or wool-producing bunnies like the angora will need 16-18 percent.

If your bunny is getting less than 30 minutes of direct sunlight a day, you'll also want to make sure their rabbit pellet is fortified with vitamin D3 (or you can provide them with a UVB lamp).

Steer clear of any "premium" rabbit pellets mixed with fruits, nuts, or seeds. These are too high in carbohydrates and sugars to be healthy for your bun, plus many

rabbits will pick through them and only eat their favorite parts, leaving them at risk for nutritional deficiencies.

#### **Suggested serving size:**

Young rabbits (*two to seven months*) should be given unlimited alfalfa-based pellets. If your baby bunny is completely ignoring their hay and eating only pellets, limit the pellets to around [1/4 cup per 2 lbs](#) body weight and adjust as needed.

Young adults (*seven months to one year*) need 1/4 cup of pellets per 3 lbs body weight.

Mature adults (*one to five years*) should be given 1/8 to 1/4 cup of pellets per 3 lbs body weight, depending on how many veggies you feed and your particular bun's metabolism. You can choose to feed less (or no) pellets but make sure to compensate with a wide variety of extra veggies to ensure they're getting plenty of nutrients.

Once your bunny has reached one year, you may want to switch them from an alfalfa-based pellet to a Timothy-based pellet. But as long as you're not mixing any alfalfa into their grass hay and the grass hay they're getting is high in fiber with optimal protein levels (such as second cut Timothy or oat hay) the tiny amount of alfalfa in their pellets should be fine.

## Treats

Healthy treats, like fresh fruit, should make up no more than [2 tsp per 4 lbs](#) body weight. If the fruit is dried (with no sugar added) halve the serving size. Dried fruit like raisins contains as much sugar as their fresh counterpart but concentrated into a much smaller piece.

Steer clear of most pet store rabbit treats. They contain unhealthy ingredients like yogurt, added sugars, and starches. If you want to feed pre-made treats, there are a few healthier options like Small Pet Select's. Look for treats without any added sugars or wheat (oat and barley are okay). You can also [make your own](#).

*Never ever* give your bunny cereals, bread, crackers, cookies, chips, candy, or any other carbilicious, starchy, sugary human food. Even in small amounts, these foods can cause a deadly condition called [enterotoxemia](#). The starches and sugars disrupt the bunny's delicate gut flora, causing an overgrowth of bad bacteria that produce iota toxins. These toxins can kill your rabbit very quickly (in a matter of 24 hours). Starchy human snacks also contribute to intermittent soft cecotropes ([isc](#)), where your poor bun produces too many runny cecotropes and makes a mess of their fur, feet, and living space.

### Bunny Safe Fruits and Treat Vegetables

1. Apple
2. Apricot
3. Banana (every bunny's favorite)
4. Berries (any kind)
5. Bell peppers
6. Carrot
7. Cherries (pit removed)
8. Currants
9. Grapes
10. Grapefruit (only feed occasionally to avoid stomach aches)
11. Kiwi
12. Melons (any kind)
13. Nectarine
14. Oranges (only feed occasionally to avoid canker sores and stomach ulcers)
15. Papaya
16. Peach
17. Pear
18. Pineapple
19. Plum
20. Star fruit
21. Tomatoes

Remember, every bunny is different, and a particular diet that works well for one bunny might leave something to be desired for the next. With the exception of treats (your bunny will always claim they haven't had enough), let your bunny and your bunny parent instincts be the final judge.

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of Bunny Parenthood**

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## Contact

[saveabunrabbitrescue@gmail.com](mailto:saveabunrabbitrescue@gmail.com)  
[\(208\) 971-9401](tel:(208)971-9401)