

Wilmette Pet Center *"the place for people who love pets"*

Rabbits and guinea pigs are some of the most popular pets, and for good reason: They are gentle, companionable, and easy to care for. Their diet is one of the most vital part of having a healthy and happy rabbit or guinea pig, although it can be confusing for some. Their diet has three components:

Pellets: What most people to consider the staple of a rabbit or guinea pig's diet is, in fact, the most minor part. Pellet food was first created for breeders, to save them time. Instead of a bowl full of pellets, they only need one to two tablespoons per day. Many veterinarians are even suggesting that they only be offered as treats.



Hay: Rabbits and guinea pigs absolutely must have hay. Offer unlimited amounts of hay for your pet. It is vital for their digestion; they must have the fiber to move their food through their digestive tract. Keep hay in the cage at all times, topping it up with fresh when they eat it down. Timothy hay is the main staple hay. Alfalfa hay should only be offered to young animals as it is high in the fat, protein, and minerals need for growth. For animals older than a year, it can be offered occasionally as a treat (they love the taste of it), but excessive alfalfa can cause obesity.

Greens: The bulk of a rabbit or guinea pig's diet should be dark, leafy greens. Smaller rabbits and guinea pigs should get 1 – 2 cups per day, and larger rabbits should get 3-4 cups. Offer a wide variety, as no one vegetable has all the required nutrients. Besides, wouldn't you get bored with the same diet day in and day out? Generally try to have 3-5 vegetables in each feeding. The basis of your mix should include: Romaine, red or green leaf lettuce, butter or Boston lettuce, or spring mix of greens. Add one or two other things: arugula, basil, beet greens—green leaves on the top, not beets themselves, carrot greens, cilantro, dandelion greens—not from the yard as it can be covered in pesticides or pollution, dill, endive, escarole, fennel, chopped finely, kale—use sparingly, if at all—high in calcium, mint, mustard or collard greens, parsley, radicchio, radish greens, sage, sorrel, and watercress. Small pieces of apple, oranges, bananas, or bell peppers are an added treat. Check out our article "Your Herbivore and You" [here](#).



Offer spinach occasionally, as it contains compounds that inhibit the absorption of calcium into their bones. Offer carrots rarely (maybe one small peeled baby carrot a week); carrots are very high in sugar, something not easily digested by rabbits or guinea pigs (only Bugs Bunny eats carrots every day). Avoid cilantro, as it is thought to contribute to bacterial infections. Never feed your rabbit or guinea pig

chocolate, cookies, crackers, bread or breadsticks, nuts, pasta or other human treats. Also don't give them corn, potatoes or onions. And don't feed them birdseed, yogurt or cat or dog food. These items can be poisonous or cause serious health problems

Guinea pigs have one special need that rabbits don't: vitamin C. Most mammals, except for guinea pigs and humans, produce their own vitamin C, so we must supplement this. Vitamin C tablets are the easiest way to do this. It takes just one tablet a day, and many guinea pigs take it from their hand as if it's a treat.

Try this recipe for homemade bunny biscuits. Offer these treats sparingly.

1 small carrot, pureed

1/2 banana, mashed until really creamy

1 tbsp honey

1/4 cup rabbit pellets, ground finely in a coffee grinder

1/4 cup ground oats, ground finely in a coffee grinder

Mix pureed carrot, banana and honey in a medium bowl. Add pellet powder and ground oats. Mix until blended. Knead in your hands for 1-2 minutes. Roll out the "dough" in 1/8- to 1/4-inch thick layers between sheets of plastic wrap. Cut into small cookies (about 3/4 inch across). Place cut shapes onto a parchment paper covered cookie sheet. Bake at 325 degrees for about 30 minutes (check to make sure they are not browning too much). Turn off the heat and let the cookies sit in the warm oven for an hour or so.

Providing the proper diet for your new little pet is not hard. It can take a little bit of time to get into the swing of it, but it is well worth it. Keep in mind a few things: variety is important, and feed them the healthy greens that you'd eat. As people better understand the digestion and nutritional needs of rabbits and guinea pigs, they are living longer, much healthier and happier lives.