

More hay please

The first rule of feeding bunnies and their delicate tummies is: if in doubt - don't let them eat it! Rabbits have strong taste buds and will try anything even if it's poisonous - it's up to you to protect them!

Which vegetables can rabbits eat?

A good guideline is to feed a minimum of 1 cup of vegetables for each 4 lbs of body weight per day.

- Artichoke leaves
- Asparagus
- Baby Sweet corns (but not full size ones)
- Beetroot (care with leafy tops as high levels of oxalic acid) - can cause gas so limit
- Broccoli (and its leaves, including purple sprouting varieties) - can cause gas so limit
- Brussels Sprouts (leaves and sprouts) - can cause gas so limit
- Cabbage (can sometimes cause digestive upsets) - can cause gas so limit
- Carrots (& carrot tops) – not the roots as they are high in sugars. Carrots should be limited due to high sugar content.
- Cauliflower (and the leaves)
- Celeriac
- Celery leaves
- Chicory
- Courgette (and flowers)
- Cucumber
- Curly Kale
- Fennel
- Green beans
- Kohl rabi
- Peas (including the leaves and pods)
- Peppers (red, green and yellow)
- Pumpkin
- Radish Tops - can cause gas so limit
- Rocket
- Romaine lettuce (not Iceberg or light coloured leaf)
- Spinach (only occasional)
- Spring Greens
- Squash (e.g. Butternut)
- Swede
- Turnip (only occasional)
- Watercress

Which fruits can rabbits eat?

*Fruits should be fed in moderation due to sugar content (**up to 2 tablespoons worth per day**).*

Do not feed the pips, stones, plants etc of fruits unless otherwise stated, as most of the time they are poisonous! Rabbits love sugary fruit and will eat too much of it, which is bad for them. Therefore it's up to you to limit it!

- Apple (not the pips - they are poisonous!)
- Apricot
- Banana (high in potassium)-**limited amount**
- Blackberries (and leaves – excellent astringent properties)
- Blueberries
- Cherries (not the pits and plant - they contain cyanide and are therefore poisonous!)
- Grapes
- Kiwi Fruit
- Mango
- Melon
- Nectarines
- Papaya
- Peaches
- Pears
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Raspberries (and leaves – excellent astringent properties)
- Strawberries (and leaves)
- Tomatoes (**NOT** the leaves)

Safe herbs for bunnies

They can taste very strong so offer a little to start with to get your bunnies used to them.

- Basil
- Coriander
- Dill
- Mint (peppermint)
- Parsley - not too much as high in calcium
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme

Wild garden herbs, weeds and flowers that rabbits can eat

- Borage
- Calendula
- Camomile
- Chickweed (astringent)
- Clover (leaves and flowers)
- Coltsfoot
- Comfrey
- Dandelion (diuretic properties)
- Goosegrass (cleavers) but may stick to coat!
- Lavender
- Mallow
- Nettle
- Nasturtium (leaves and flowers)
- Shepherd's purse
- Sow Thistle
- Plantain
- Yarrow

Why is hay so important for rabbits?

Hay might look boring to humans but for rabbits it's their main dish of the day, with 80-90% of their diet needing to be hay! (and grass is very good too!) It keeps them healthy and helps them function in a number of ways, the main ones being:



- **Hay keeps the gut moving!!!**
Hay is made up of long fibers that help the muscles of the bunny's gut stay strong. A rabbit's complex digestive system means they need to constantly snack on hay throughout the day to keep things moving inside, and help prevent blockages (e.g. from fur or things they've eaten - rabbits seem to have little concept of what they can and cannot digest!) Blockages can often be fatal. If a rabbit doesn't eat enough hay then this can slow down the rabbit's intestinal functions and cause serious problems e.g. **GI Stasis** (see below).

- **Chewing hay grinds their ever-growing teeth down to a safe level**
Rabbits' teeth continually grow, including all of their back ones (did you know rabbits have 28 teeth?!) If these aren't kept in check by wearing them down on hay and grass, they can grow out of control and cause painful abscesses, and even grow into the eyes from within. It's a fast process - **rabbit teeth grow about 12cm a year!** Eye problems are often linked to the teeth. Other foods (even hard pellets) do not wear the teeth down like the side-to-side jaw action used when eating hay.
- Keeps bunnies busy rearranging it and searching for the best tasting pieces
- Teaches rabbits good litter tray habits



What is GI Stasis?

It stands for *GastroIntestinal Stasis* and is also known as 'the silent killer' as you have to watch carefully for it. G.I. Stasis is the condition of food not moving through the gut as quickly as normal. The gut contents may dehydrate and compact into a hard, immobile mass (impacted gut), blocking the digestive tract of the rabbit. Food in an immobile gut may also ferment, causing significant gas buildup and resultant gas pain for the rabbit.



The first noticeable symptom of G.I. Stasis may be that the rabbit suddenly stops eating, or may not be pooping. You MUST take your rabbit to the vet if he shows either of these symptoms, or any other change. If not, it can become fatal within 24 hours.

How much hay should rabbits eat and how often?

They should eat a bundle of hay **their own body size every day!** They need access to **clean hay** every day (no one likes dirty or stale food!) and in **unlimited portions**. Make sure wherever they are they have access to fresh, clean hay to snack on, and access to water to keep the hay going down nicely. Yesterday's hay can be moved to their toilet area, with a nice fresh pile of hay in its place.



Is all hay the same?

No! There are many different types and if you shop around you'll see it ranges from cheap, dusty, yellow short bits of hay (avoid!) to luscious, **sweet-smelling green hay**. Timothy hay is the most popular, but you can also find others such as oat hay. Alfafa hay contains a lot of calcium and protein (which adult bunnies don't need a lot of) so feed sparingly.



Lily and Billy are fans of Green Oat Hay, Meadow hay, and a large bale of hay from the local farm (sometimes we mix the hay, sometimes we alternate them). Hay bales are good for their toilet as it's cheaper, with more expensive hays kept in separate piles to munch on. Experiment with hays and grasses - a wide range is available, some with dandelions and herbs mixed in!

My rabbits won't eat hay; can I give them something else?

All rabbits need to eat hay, but they can be fussy (well they do have over 17,000 taste buds - that's 7,000 more than humans!) so you just need to find one that they like and make sure they're not filling up on other foods. See tips below for getting them to eat more hay. In the meantime, make sure they have **access to grass** as this is also good for them and acts in a similar way to hay. If they don't currently eat grass, wean them onto it slowly to avoid upset stomachs. Don't feed them grass from lawnmowers as the way its chopped causes it to ferment, which is bad for their tummies, and only feed grass that hasn't been near traffic fumes.



How can I get my rabbit to eat more hay?

A common problem with rabbits! Bunnies love to eat and nibble on things, and will always choose tastier things than hay given the chance. Here are some tips to get your rabbits eating more hay:



- Cutting down on pellets (dry food) will encourage them to snack on hay (they only need an eggcup size portion per day). Try feeding pellets for breakfast and just provide hay throughout the day. **WARNING:** Slowly reduce the amount of pellets you give them - if they're not used to eating hay then suddenly taking away their main food source could be dangerous
- Try them on various hays (try asking for sample packs so you don't have to buy a big bag each time)
- Mix tasty bits in with their hay encouraging them to forage in there, such as grass and herbs
- Mix a few hays into one pile
- Stuff toilet roll tubes with hay to make fun games for them
- Put hay everywhere they go so they can't get away from it!
- Rabbits like to eat hay while they're going to the toilet, so put a pile of hay in their litter tray
- **Grass** is also good for rabbits' teeth and tummies so give them grass while you're wearing them onto hay! (Pick from your garden but don't give lawn mowing as it turns mushy and can upset their stomachs)
- 'Readigrass' is dried grass, good for rabbit teeth and can help wean them onto hay textures (may be high in calcium so only give a small handful per day, try mixing in with hay)
- Wave hay in their face and tap it on their mouths - it will annoy them enough to bite it and this eventually turns into them eating it!
- Lightly spray pineapple juice on some hay and let it dry, they'll like the sweet taste
- Different rabbits like different hays so take notes and once they start eating hay, try ones that have previously been 'dismissed' by them as they may like them now they have a taste for hay!