

RABBIT FEEDING

PRO-RAB-003
V.1 October 2020

*This Procedure underpins RSPCA South Australia's
Animal Care Policy.*

Purpose

This Rabbit Feeding Procedure provides employees and volunteers feeding instruction to ensure rabbits are consistently fed the correct food and amount to maintaining a healthy rabbit.

Scope

This Procedure applies to employees and volunteers of RSPCA SA (collectively 'workers').

Details

Feeding the right diet is one of the most important factors in maintaining a healthy rabbit. Rabbits should be fed the types of food they are adapted to eating. In the wild, rabbits eat predominantly grass. They may graze for up to 6-8 hours a day. Their whole digestive tract from their teeth right down to the end of their gastrointestinal tract is adapted to this diet and eating pattern.

Therefore, providing grass and grass hay to pet rabbits is critical to maintain health. Eating grass and grass hay encourages long periods of chewing, which is necessary to wear down their continuously growing teeth, thereby helping to prevent dental disease (a common health problem in pet rabbits).

The high fibre content of grass and grass hay is crucial for normal digestion. If the diet is too low in fibre, fatal digestive problems can occur - another common problem in pet rabbits. Foraging for and chewing on grass or grass hay also helps to increase activity levels and prevent boredom and behavioural problems.

Procedure

Prior to feeding a rabbit, you are required to:

- 🌿 See if the rabbit is on a special diet. Rabbits on special diets will have a laminated sign on their enclosure outlining their dietary requirements.
- 🌿 Ensure you are PAW trained to interact with that particular rabbit. Refer to PAW Level Identification Procedure for additional information.
- 🌿 Check behaviour notes on the body function sheet to provide you with information prior to opening the rabbit's enclosure.
- 🌿 See if there is an animal behaviour dot on the body function sheet. Refer to Animal Dot Behaviour Procedure for additional information.
- 🌿 Assess the rabbit's behaviour. Refer to Assess a Rabbit's Behaviour Procedure for additional information. By assessing a rabbit's behaviour and taking time to evaluate its possible reaction, you can mitigate the risk of bite or scratch injury. If not safe to proceed, feed another rabbit and return once finished and reassess the rabbit's behaviour. If the rabbit continues to indicate unsafe behaviour, do not proceed and seek advice from the Animal Care Employee/Manager.

Feeding

To ensure rabbits in RSPCA's care have a healthy balanced diet:

- 🌿 Provide 1 to 2 handfuls of fresh grass or grass hay (this should comprise about 80% of the overall diet) per day - e.g. Timothy, Oaten, Wheaten, Pasture, Paddock, Meadow or Ryegrass hays. Rabbits should not be fed Lucerne (alfalfa) or Clover hays as they are too high in protein and calcium, which could lead to the formation of urinary stones.
- 🌿 Give about 50gm of pellets (1/5 of a cup) per kilo of rabbit every day.
- 🌿 1 cup of fresh leafy greens and vegetables per day (if not available can slightly increase pellets given).

Vegetables rabbits CAN eat				
Watercress	Asparagus	Capsicum	Parsnip	Carrot (minimal)
Spring greens	Baby sweetcorn	Snow peas	Turnip	Chicory
Spinach	Beetroot (not tops)	Whole Green beans	Celery	Cucumber
Dark lettuce varieties (not iceberg)	Broccoli (not too much as can cause soft stool)	Fennel	Celeriac	Zucchini
Rocket	Brussel sprouts	Parsnip	Cauliflower	Bok Choy/Asian Greens
Radish tops	Cabbage	Curly Kale	Carrot tops	Sweet Potato
Squash	Pumpkin	Cucumber	Silver beet	Endive

* *Avoid Brassica (broccoli, kale, Brussel sprouts, asparagus, cauliflower etc. will cause loose stools)*

* *Iceberg/light lettuce varieties (will cause loose stools if too much consumed)*

Herbs Rabbits CAN eat (NB: Not all rabbits will enjoy the flavours)				
Basil	Parsley	Oregano	Dill	Coriander
Rosemary	Peppermint	Mint		

Wild Garden Herbs/Weeds/Flowers that Rabbits CAN eat		
Thistle	Nettle	Nasturtium (leaves and flowers)
Camomile	Lavender	
Dandelions (diuretic)	Couch Grass	Plantain
Clovers (leaves and flowers)	Fresh Grass (avoid if lush)	Borage

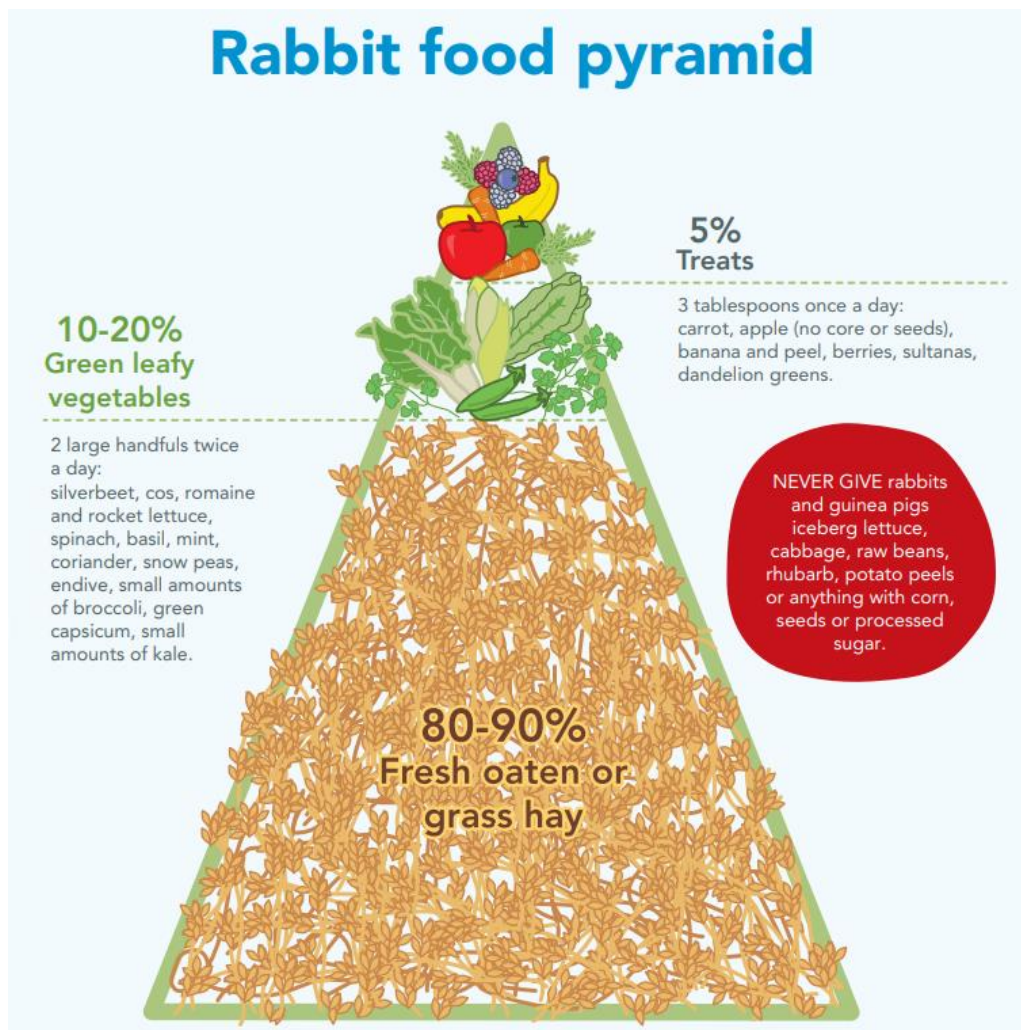
Most weeds found growing in lawns are safe, BUT avoid flowering ornamental plants as these are generally toxic.

Fruits Rabbits CAN eat	
	Apricot
Strawberries (including leaves)	Tomatoes (NOT the leaves)
Banana	Blackberries (including leaves)
Blueberries	Cherries
Grapes (including leaves)	Kiwi fruit
Mango	Melon
Nectarines	Peaches
Pear (not seeds)	Pineapple
Plums (including leaves)	Raspberries (including leaves)
Papaya	Apple (not seeds)

Rabbits CAN NOT eat the following - DO NOT FEED			
Lucerne (alfalfa) or Clover hay (very high in protein & calcium - can make Rabbits very unwell long term).			
Henbane	Hemlock	Toadflax	Lilly of the Valley
Amaryllis	White Cedar	Arum Lily	Bindweed
Bracken	Bryony	Delphinium	Hellebores (Christmas rose)
Ragwort	Privet	Laburnum	Lupin
Avocado	Oleander	Buttercup	Cereal or grain mixed food
Stick Weed	Poppies	Oak Leaves	Chocolate/sweets/sugar cereals
Rhubarb & leaves	Sower sobs	Evergreen leaves	Breads/biscuits
Tomato Leaves	Deadly nightshade	Nuts or seeds	Corn/beans/peas
Potato Tops	Scarlet Runner	Foxglove	Elder

- Treats may be offered in small quantities (1-2 tablespoons per rabbit per day). Examples include most fruits and root vegetables (such as carrot and sweet potato) and capsicum. Note that carrot should not be fed in large quantities.

Fruits rabbits CAN eat	
Strawberries (including leaves)	Apricot
Banana	Tomatoes (NOT the leaves)
Blueberries	Blackberries (including leaves)
Grapes (including leaves)	Cherries
Mango	Kiwi fruit
Nectarines	Melon
Pear (not seeds)	Peaches
Plums (including leaves)	Pineapple
Papaya	Raspberries (including leaves)
	Apple (not seeds)



- Do NOT feed the following: cereals, grains, nuts, seeds, corn, beans, peas, breads, biscuits, sweets, sugar, breakfast cereals, chocolate or any garden plants that are toxic to rabbits.
- Keep feeds and feeding habits consistent to minimise digestive upsets.
- Always have unlimited fresh clean water available. Rabbits prefer open dishes (bowls) over bottled drinkers as lapping from a dish is more natural and encourages greater water intake.
- Water should be placed in a heavy bowl, which cannot be tipped over and must be replaced daily.

- 🌿 The amount the Rabbit is fed will also be determined by their size and breed. Other contributing factors can be their age, activity level and general metabolic rate. When food is being left uneaten slightly reduce the serve the following day and then re-assess. Generally, a 1kg Netherland Dwarf will require approximately 60g per day and a 2.5kg Dwarf Lop 120g per day. Obesity should be avoided as overweight rabbits are prone to disease (heart, liver, kidney etc.) and will have both breeding and birthing difficulties. Obese Rabbits also struggle to clean themselves which may lead to other health issues.
- 🌿 Provide each rabbit with enrichment. Refer to Rabbit Enrichment Procedure.

Requirements

- 🌿 Fill in the body function sheet AM and PM.
- 🌿 You can re-use dry food, if returning to same rabbit, unless it is soiled or soggy.
- 🌿 Do not overfeed. Remember the rabbits do not get as much exercise at the animal care centre as they would in a home.
- 🌿 Where there are multiple rabbits in an enclosure, ensure all rabbits are eating before moving on to next enclosure.
- 🌿 If any rabbit appears to not be eating, start weighing the rabbit daily. If the rabbit is in an enclosure with other rabbits, move to a separate enclosure on its own if possible. If the rabbit is losing weight, advise the Animal Care Manger or delegate immediately.
- 🌿 Provide fresh water daily.
- 🌿 If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask a rabbit animal care employee.

Reporting

1. Volunteers - Report any behaviour or medical (lethargy, not eating, eye/nasal discharge, sneezing, etc.) concerns to an animal care employee immediately, also add notes to the communication book.
2. Employees - Add notes general animal notes (GAN) under the behaviour category on the rabbit's ShelterMate profile. Change PAW level and add animal behaviour dot, if required.
3. Employees - Place any medical issues on WaitWhile. If immediate attention is required, radio Vet Team immediately to advise of any serious medical issues identified.

Associated documents

PAW Level Identification Procedure
Animal Behaviour Dot Procedure
Assessing a Rabbit's Behaviour Procedure
Interacting with a Rabbit Procedure
Rabbit Care Procedure
Handling a Rabbit Procedure
Rabbit Enclosure Paperwork Procedure
Rabbit Enrichment Procedure
WHS Reporting Procedure

WHS reporting

All workplace incidents/injuries are to be reported on the online [Incident/Injury Reporting Form](#)

All identified hazard/property damage are to be reported on the online [Hazard/Property Damage Report Form](#)

Non-compliance

This Rabbit Feeding Procedure is endorsed by all members of the Animal Operations Senior Leadership Team and authorised by the Head of Animal Operations. Failure to comply with this procedure may result in disciplinary action, which may lead up to and include termination of employment or volunteering placement.

Roles and responsibilities

Head of Animal Operations	Approve the Rabbit Feeding Procedure. Ensure workers are trained on the Rabbit Feeding Procedure.
Animal Care Managers	Review and update Rabbit Feeding Procedure. Ensure workers are trained on the Rabbit Feeding Procedure. Monitor compliance with the Rabbit Feeding Procedure.
Animal Care Employees	Ensure volunteers are trained on the Rabbit Feeding Procedure. Monitor volunteer compliance with the Rabbit Feeding Procedure.
Workers	Comply with the Rabbit Feeding Procedure.

Version control

Version	Approval date	Review date	Comments
1.0	October 2020	October 2023	New