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Add ing veggies to my raw dog food.

[May 9, 2017 Plear BARF, Commercial, Dogs, Prey Model 25 comments](#)



For years, I fed my dogs a prey model diet with no added vegetables or supplements (beyond fish oil).

The results were great; switching to raw was one of the best decisions I ever made for my dog's overall health.

But the more research I did, the more I began to step outside the more strict “prey model” philosophy.

In this article, I plan to bust some myths and explain why I changed my philosophy when it comes to including vegetables in raw dog food diets.

Dogs don't *need* plant matter for survival... but it can be beneficial.

Dogs do not require vegetables or carbohydrates in their diet.

This is something virtually everyone agrees on, including AAFCO and NRC – *carbs are not essential for a dog's survival.*

But when I switched my dogs to raw, I did so with the intention of feeding them the best possible diet I could, not just what they needed to meet minimum dietary requirements for survival.

Just because an animal doesn't require something for survival doesn't mean it isn't beneficial.

And while there *is* evidence that veggies can be beneficial for dogs, there is *no* sound evidence that they are harmful in moderation.

Benefits of vegetables for dogs.

Vegetables provide a source of nutrients like vitamin C, vitamin K, and **some** minerals that are not found in significant enough amounts in just meat, bone, and organ.

While dogs have the ability to synthesize their own vitamin C and vitamin K, including some of these vitamins in the diet can be beneficial.

Vegetables and fruits are a great source of **phytochemicals, antioxidants, and fiber.**

One study found that Scottish Terriers fed leafy green or yellow/orange veggies at least three times a week were up to 70-90% less likely to develop bladder cancer, even though vitamin supplements didn't show the same results [1].

Studies show an organic compound called "sulforaphane", found in cruciferous vegetables, may have potential anti-cancer properties in canines [2, 3, 4].

Then "Baicalein", a flavonoid found in some plant roots, has also been the subject of research due to its potential anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory properties [5].

It is important to keep in mind that the concentrations of these compounds found in vegetables will not be enough to cure cancer, and these *in vitro* studies do not guarantee that feeding vegetables alone can prevent or cure cancer.

The takeaway from these studies should be that fresh, whole foods, including vegetables, contain beneficial nutrients, compounds, and phytochemicals with a long list of potential benefits for the overall health of our dogs (and ourselves!), which cannot be replicated by synthetic vitamin supplements alone.

Wild canids do consume plant matter.

A common argument against feeding veggies is that our dog's wild cousins don't eat plant matter. However, this is false.

A closer look at many of the studies used to back up this argument reveals that these studies took place during winter months and/or were focused on northern species, but this isn't an accurate representation of all wild canine diets; because significantly less vegetation would've been available to the canids in these studies, obviously the consumption of less vegetation will be observed.

Other studies demonstrate that the diet is not the same year round [6], showing that more variety – and, yes, plant matter – is consumed during summer and spring months [7]. Location is also a huge factor.

Is “prey model” an accurate representation of wild canid diets?

The “prey model” diet of meat, bone, and organ actually does not even accurately represent what canids eat in the wild.

Wild canids would also be consuming fur, feathers, and hide, and would have access to far greater of a variety of organ meats, glands, and other by-products that are difficult or impossible to provide in a “prey model” diet for our dogs.

This means that, unless someone is feeding primarily whole prey to their dog, “prey model” diets likely fall short in many minerals and definitely contain less fiber and roughage than the true diet of wild canids.

We must also consider the nutritional differences in a wild canid’s diet of primarily wild ungulates – in other words, grass fed red meat – in comparison with a typical “prey model” diet – in other words, primarily conventionally farmed, and usually poultry-based.

Are modern wild canid diets relevant to domestic canines?

Research suggests that the evolution of dogs from wild wolves is a lot more complex than previously thought.

The exact species of our dog’s ancestors may not even be alive today, and genetic analysis of dogs and wolves reveal that dogs are much more closely related to each other than they are with their wild ancestors – including primitive breeds like the basenji [8].

Genetic analysis has also demonstrated that dogs have developed the ability to produce more pancreatic amylase than wolves [9].

Amylase is an enzyme that is used in the digestion of starch.

This analysis shows that not only do wild canids have the ability to digest starch, but domestic canines can do so significantly more effectively than their wild cousins.

So although dogs and wolves have very similar digestive systems, they are technically not 100% the same – and that difference shouldn't be overlooked.

This varies by breed, too – a sighthound like a saluki might thrive on a higher starch diet than a northern breed like a malamute.

What this means is, when researching wolf diets to learn more about what we should feed our dogs, we need to take it with a grain of salt. Although studying the diet of our dog's ancestors is an important factor, it simply shouldn't be the sole basis used to decide what is best for our dogs.

For these reasons, using wolf diet studies as definitive, "end all be all" guidelines for the domestic dog's diet is short-sighted and inaccurate.

Nutrition myths, misunderstandings, and logical fallacies.

The idea that a diet should be completely based on what wild animals eat is rooted in a logical fallacy called "appeal to nature" which claims that because something is natural, it must be good.

This is a flawed argument.

Distemper, rabies, mange, malnutrition, injuries, and parasites are all natural.

Just because something is natural doesn't mean it is what is best for our dogs.

Strict "prey model" advocates commonly claim that dogs should not eat plant matter because they can't digest cellulose, but this shows a lack of understanding of digestion and nutrition.

Us humans can't digest cellulose either!

Cellulose is, by definition, fiber; and fiber is, by definition, the indigestible portion of plant-based foods.

The reason fiber is beneficial is in fact because it is not digestible. This is not an argument against including plant matter in the diet; in fact, fiber is an excellent reason to add plant matter. Fiber do provides a source of prebiotics and fermentable substrates that help improve healthy gut function [10]. Small amounts of fiber have been shown to be beneficial for gut microbiome health in dogs [11].

Moderation is key.

Within many prey model circles, there seems to be a disconnect – many assume that when someone recommends the addition of plant matter in a dog’s diet, that automatically translates to recommending plant matter make up a large portion of the diet.

The misunderstanding seems to be that there is no middle ground or moderation.

But this isn’t further from the truth; the dog’s diet should be primarily meat based, and plant matter should be used in moderation, supplementally alongside the meat based diet.

A diet can contain veggies and still be “low carb”.

Including a reasonable amount of vegetables (about 10%) in your dog’s diet will not be a strain on your dog’s pancreas, nor will it create issues with nutrient absorption from anti-nutrients.

You only need to worry about that if you are feeding very large amounts of grain and vegetables.

For this reason, it is recommend feeding no more than 30% veggies unless your dog has a medical condition that calls for more.

What do the experts say?

Steve Brown, author of *Unlocking the Canine Ancestral Diet and See Spot Live Longer* and owner of Darwin’s Natural Pet Products, is considered an expert by many in the raw dog food community. He

believes plant matter should be fed to dogs in a raw diet, writing, “Vegetables and other plant matter were part of the dog’s ancestral diet.”

Vegetables do provide “some” essential nutrients, including fiber, minerals and vitamins.

Without the plant matter providing those nutrients, an all-meat diet **would need supplements.**

Vegetables can also help protect against certain forms of cancer.” You can read more about Steve Brown’s philosophy on vegetables for dogs in his article by clicking [here](#).

Lew Olson, PhD, author of Raw and Natural Nutrition for Dogs, states in one of her monthly B-Naturals newsletters (which you can read by clicking [here](#)),

“Feeding vegetables may not be entirely necessary, but they can offer benefits of fiber and calories in home cooked diets and they may offer some useful nutrients in raw diets.”

Dr. Karen Becker is another well-known name in the raw dog food industry.

In [this article](#), she states, “Vegetables are important to the health of pets.

Dogs need them because they contain essential nutrients (such as powerful antioxidants) not provided by other foods like meat and bones.

Wild dogs, wolves, and coyotes consume grasses, berries, and wild fruits and vegetables to acquire these important nutrients.”

Cat Lane is the canine nutritionist behind The Possible Canine and the Facebook group Canine Nutrition and Natural Health.

She has also written about including vegetables in a dog’s diet. “Recent awareness about overconsumption of carbohydrate foods has led many to feel that all carbs are undesirable and that, sadly, includes fruit and

more importantly, vegetables.” Her article is a must read; you can check it out by clicking [here](#).

How should I add vegetables to my dog’s raw diet?



Adding vegetables to your dog’s diet is easy.

Vegetables should be processed in some way to make them more bioavailable and easier to utilize.

You can do this by pureeing, chopping/grinding to a pulp in a food processor, or cooking.

Since cooking may deplete some nutrients, I prefer to process veggies for my dogs using a food processor.

I then freeze the veggie mix into molds for easy feeding.



Leafy green vegetables, like kale, chard, spinach, arugula, parsley or mustard greens should be the main focus.

Broccoli, green beans, bell peppers, and carrots are also good choices. Fruits like blueberries, cranberries, papaya, pineapple, and raspberries offer great antioxidants, but are high in sugar, so use in moderation. Starchy veggies like sweet potato and pumpkin are a good choice for some dogs, but should be avoided or kept to a minimum if your dog doesn't need to gain weight.

I still follow "prey model" ratios, I just added veggies in – so I feed 70-75% muscle meat, 10% bone, 5-10% veggies/fruits, and 10% organs. I prefer these ratios over BARF because the prey model bone percentage is much more accurate in providing a correct amount of

calcium in the diet, and I feel that BARF ratios provide too much room for error in that regard.

Conclusion.

Does your dog NEED veggies in their raw diet in order to survive?

No, absolutely not.

But are there benefits to adding veggies to your dog's raw diet in moderation?

Personally, I say yes, but that is for you to decide for your own dogs.

Every dog is different.