

Choosing Coonhound Cuisine

How to feed your hungry hound for a long and healthy life.

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Close to Home Some commercial foods may cross over, and come closer to homemade in terms of freshness and purity. These include the frozen raw diets, and organic dry and canned dog foods. At least one company offers a pre-mix of vitamins, minerals, grains and dried organ meats, to which you add fresh veggies, kefir (liquid yogurt) and raw meat and you have a simplified way of preparing a balanced homemade diet.

Chawn Santana, a coonhound breeder based in Northern California, began feeding this type of pre-mixed diet to her Redbone, English and Bluetick Coonhounds in 1994, when the concerns about the preservative ethoxyquin, natural food enzymes being destroyed by commercial processing, and the quality of pet-food meat were surfacing. There was no question as to whether or not to feed [a raw, homemade diet], just whether or not to make the effort, Santana says. Feeding raw food is such a lifestyle change for most people, you can't force it. But I knew it had to be better for my dogs.

Santana, who hunts and competes with her hounds in United Kennel Club (UKC) performance events, notes the biggest change she sees in her dogs, besides continued good overall health, is in their muscle condition. They put on a lot of really nice, solid muscle on the raw diet, and they don't need so much road work in the off season to keep in condition, Santana says.

A holistic veterinarian will support your decision to feed a raw diet, but most traditional practitioners have reservations. If you opt for a homemade diet, whether raw or cooked, be sure to use recipes verified to be complete and balanced, by comparison to AAFCO (American Association of Feed Control Officials) nutrient profiles for dogs. Resources exist for formulating a customized, complete-and-balanced recipe for your dog through veterinary schools or private consultation with veterinary nutritionists. Some veterinarians advise periodic blood-testing for dogs on homemade diets, to be sure no deficiencies or excesses develop.

Narrow Your Choice If you opt for a dry or canned commercial dog food, gear up to do your homework. Get a jump on things by asking for advice from someone you trust: your veterinarian, your dogs breeder or a friend who owns healthy dogs.

A friend's recommendation led Bluetick breeder Rodney Rose, in Jewell County, Kan., to the commercial diet he's been feeding his dogs for the past 15 years. Rose likes the results he sees in his dogs. His kennel has produced two dual Grand Champion dogs. It's important to us that our dogs look good and feel good, Rose says.