

## Choosing Coonhound Cuisine

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

*Susan Bertram, D.V.M.*

However, don't just stop with the recommendation. Find out why your nutrition resource person recommends one diet over another. What research or evidence supports their choice? Veterinarians can't know the details of all dog foods, but they should be knowledgeable about major brands, and not just the brands they're selling. Sticking with major companies, whose reputations rely on getting good results, is one tactic. Throwing money at the problem is another, as relative price usually reflects relative quality. You still need to study the ingredients, though, and be aware of artificially inflated pricing.

What's On the List? Once you narrow your choice to two or three options, you can begin comparing the ingredient lists printed on the food labels. The ingredients are listed in descending order of predominance by weight. So, if chicken is listed first, there is more chicken, by weight, than the next ingredient, and so on. One caveat: Chicken is a wet ingredient, perhaps 70 percent moisture (water) by weight, while a grain, such as soy, might be just 10 percent water. So on a dry matter basis (water removed) there may be more soy than chicken after all. In addition, chicken meal (or beef meal or lamb meal) is a dry ingredient, so if a meat meal is listed before any grains, there's a good chance meat is the major source of protein in the food. Your best bet is to select a diet listing one or two meat ingredients, ahead of one, or at most two, grain ingredients.

Consider that grains aren't a huge percentage of a wild dog's natural diet. Although the grinding and cooking process used for kibbled dog food enables dogs to digest grains, grains have protein of lower biological value than meats. A diet of 26 percent protein and 18 percent fat can be fed to dogs of any age, from puppies to pregnant females, to hard-working hunting dogs. This much protein only causes problems in dogs with pre-existing, documented kidney failure, or dogs with hepatic encephalopathy.

All the coonhound experts we spoke with feed diets containing protein levels from 25 to 28 percent protein, and 15 to 18 percent fat. Keep in mind, these folks are out hunting their dogs for four or five hours, two to five nights per week. The high protein level helps support muscle mass and endurance during hard work, and the high fat provides energy to burn, says Jay Benton, D.V.M., who owns Silsbee Animal Clinic and Maple Slough Kennels in Silsbee, Texas. Dr. Benton has owned, bred and hunted Treeing Walker Coonhounds for 20 years.

Coonhounds aren't hyper, and if you're not hunting them, they don't expend much energy, Dr. Benton says. If you're not pushing a dog hard, you need to cut down on the protein and fat.

Dr. Benton uses three or four different foods, and tailors nutrition to the needs of the individual dog, based on age, growth and activity level. If your coonhound leads a sedentary, suburban or urban existence, you should be either extra careful with portion control (feeding a measured amount) or pick a lower-fat food, at about eight to 10 percent, to avoid weight gain. The quality of food you feed also dictates how much you'll need to feed. The coonhound breeders we interviewed who feed high-quality, nutrient-rich dry food, feed about three to four cups of dry kibble per day. That's an 8-ounce cup, not a super-sized drink cup from the convenience store!