

Choosing Coonhound Cuisine

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

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A commercial diet in any form still needs to be scrutinized for a complete-and-balanced assurance. The label must carry a statement of nutritional adequacy, and how the diet met regulatory criteria: either by an AAFCO-approved feeding trial or by comparison to AAFCO nutrient profiles. If you don't see this claim, or if the claim states for intermittent or supplemental feeding only, call the company for details.

Variety Is SpiceAll dogs need some fiber in their diets for normal intestinal tract function. Grains, especially whole grains with their natural bran (which is contained in the outer layer of grains, and is the source of their natural fiber content) intact, are good sources of fiber, as are vegetables and fruits. Most dogs relish the variety of added fruit or vegetables to their daily ration.

Vicki Redditt, a kennel owner in Indiatlantic, Fla., feeds her coonhounds mangos and other fruits off the trees in her yard. Its easy to add fresh veggies and fruits to your coonhounds diet. Just chop or cook up some extra when preparing the family meal, and toss them in with the kibble. Fruits and veggies provide vitamins and minerals, phyto-nutrients and anti-oxidants. (But avoid onions, grapes and raisins, which can be toxic to dogs, particularly in large amounts.)

For many dog owners, adding fresh foods to a high-quality commercial diet balances the best of both worlds: the convenience of a balanced dry formula, with the benefits of fresh ingredients. Lean meats and whole grains add texture and variety to the daily fare. That's how Edith Atchley feeds her dogs at kennel in Huntsville, Alabama. She used to drive all the way to Georgia to purchase fresh frozen, preservative-free dog food, but now Atchley shares family leftovers with her dogs, including her up-and-coming hound Ch. Rockytop Dynasty of Sumar, who was in the top 25 in 2002 in the American Black and Tan Coonhound Clubs (ABTCC) limited showing.

Its important that the leftovers are fit for human consumption, Atchley says. Moldy or spoiled leftovers can cause gastrointestinal upset, or introduce cancer-causing agents, produced by molds, into your dogs system.

After all your research and investigation, you can make an intelligent, educated decision on what to feed your coonhound. If you're changing diets, be sure to do so gradually, by mixing old and new together for a week or two, so your dog won't suffer digestive upset. As long as no vomiting, diarrhea, itchy skin or ear infections develop (any of which could indicate your dog is allergic to an ingredient in the food), wait about two or three months to evaluate how the diet suits your dogs. Our coonhound experts offered some general advice: Your dog should maintain a good weight, even with heavy exercise; have bright, alert eyes (not red or swollen-looking; a shiny, healthy coat; and firm bowel movements. The less stool your dog produces, the more useable nutrition your dog is getting out of every cup of fooda good indication the diet doesn't contain a load of indigestible fillers.