

1

## Dog Food

*Healthy Gourmet Fare for Your Discriminating Canine*



There are countless ways to show your dog affection and pamper him with the very best of everything money can buy. Your favorite pooch might look adorable in a Gucci collar while being carried around in a Louis Vuitton carrier and wearing a cashmere sweater from Louisdog. But the very first step in truly pampering your dog is to focus on his health and nutrition. Providing a well-balanced and healthy diet could extend his life span and help avoid medical problems, which might require expensive and stressful visits to the vet.

Supermarkets and pet supply superstores carry a wide range of well-known dog food brands. But, have you ever actually read the labels to learn what's in those foods? All dog foods are definitely not created equal in terms of ingredients and nutritional value. Plus, the amount of money you spend on food doesn't always reflect the quality or nutritional value of what you're buying.

On your quest to find the best dog food for your pampered pooch, step one is to learn about your many options. In addition to the dog foods sold at your local supermarket and pet supply superstores, many of the best premium dog food brands are available exclusively through smaller, independent stores or online.

Innova, from Natura Pet Products, is one of many examples of a pet food brand that focuses on selling only healthy, nutritious, chemical-free, and natural ingredients. Plus, the manufacturing process follows the same strict standards that are applied to food for humans. According to Paul French, marketing director at Natura Pet Products, "Where the food is made is just as important as the ingredients put into it. Most pet food is manufactured in facilities that are not suitable for human food manufacturing, because the requirements and standards for pet foods are very different. For one thing, most pet food manufacturing facilities are not USDA inspected . . . in terms of quality assurance. Our manufacturing plants follow the same standards as a human food production plant."

## Focus on Ingredients

Just because your dog eats the food you give him doesn't mean it's good for him. Look at the list of ingredients in the dog food as you would look at a menu. The ingredients are listed in descending order, by weight. But even if the first item listed is good, check out the next five or six items, taken together, because it's these items that mainly comprise what your dog will be eating. And if the very last item in the ingredients list is broccoli, for example, only a small amount has been added so the manufacturer can promote the fact that vegetables have been added.

If you don't know exactly what something is, think twice about feeding it to your dog. Also watch out for vague terms. "Meat and bone meal," for example, could mean it originated from anything red blooded. "Poultry fat" can come from anything with feathers. Find a brand that has all-natural ingredients, so you know what your dog is getting.

A premium brand of dog food will typically cost anywhere from 20 to 35 percent more than regular supermarket brands, but your dog will be healthier as a result, ultimately saving you a lot in veterinary bills throughout your pet's life. Also, in terms of volume consumed, you'll typically need to feed your dog less of a premium brand for him to get the same or better nutritional value.

A well-fed dog should not have itchy and dry skin, smelly ears, a runny nose, or watery eyes; these can be symptoms of a poor diet. When you switch from a low-quality dog food to a premium food, you'll see positive results in your dog, often within two weeks. For example, you'll notice his eyes will be clearer, his coat will be shinier, his breath will smell better, he may have more energy, and his overall health will be improved.

## Canned or Kibbles?

Many veterinarians will tell you that for small dogs and puppies, kibbles (dry food) are better for their teeth. If you feed your dog hard biscuits as treats and brush his teeth, however, this has the same effect, so soft (canned) food is totally acceptable.

*Tip* For help choosing the ideal dog food for your pampered pooch, consult with your veterinarian and local pet supply shop, plus do your own research by visiting the web sites of the various pet food companies.

From a nutritional standpoint, if you compare the canned and dry versions of the same dog food brand, they're almost always identical. In most cases, the big difference is that canned food contains more water and dry food contains more grains. Many dogs will help you make the decision about dry or canned food, because they'll show a definite preference.

## Choosing the Right Formula

Most dog food brands offer different formulas designed for the different life stages of a dog and sometimes for various breed groups or sizes. The best way to decide which formula is appropriate for your dog is to learn about his life expectancy. Dogs with longer life expectancies should remain on the puppy formula longer, for example, because it takes them longer to be fully grown. Your veterinarian will help you determine when your dog is considered a puppy, an adult dog, or a senior, and will also help you decide if your dog has specific dietary needs, based on a medical condition or allergies.

There are some dog food brands that offer one formula for all ages and breeds of dogs. In most cases, this food is just as nutritious and healthy for your dog as feeding him an age-appropriate or breed-appropriate formula. With the exception of puppy formulas, the idea of different formulas of dog foods was originally a marketing concept created by the major manufacturers to get more space on store shelves.

Some older dogs may have health conditions that require them to eat a diet that's lower in salt or protein or fat; your veterinarian can tell you if that's the case with your dog. However, research has shown that puppies have unique dietary needs that are addressed in puppy-specific formulas, especially when you're dealing with premium dog foods. So while your dog is still a puppy, make sure he's eating food that's appropriate for his needs.

*Tip* If you decide to switch dog food brands or formulas, make the transition slowly and watch for allergic reactions. For up to ten days, mix a small amount of the new food in with your dog's current food. Each day, gradually add more of the new food until your dog is eating only the new food. You can make the change a little faster if you see no negative reactions.

### Dog Food Can Be Mixed with People Food . . . Occasionally

Dog food is specifically formulated to provide your pet with a well-balanced, nutritious diet. If you supplement this occasionally with a few leftovers or special treats, that's usually fine. To people, dog food doesn't usually look too appetizing, so we tend to want to jazz it up by supplementing it with the food we're eating. But too much of a good thing will throw off the "balanced" part of your dog's balanced diet. Limit the extras to no more than 10 percent of your dog's overall diet. Avoid overfeeding him and watch out for choking hazards, such as bones or wads of soft cheese.

## Does Your Dog Need a Variety of Flavors?

Some dog food brands have chicken, beef, lamb, and even fish flavors and promote the fact that you can offer your dog variety in his diet. The fact is, as long as the food you're offering meets your dog's nutritional needs, there's no need for variety. This, too, is a marketing ploy. A dog does not wake up in the morning craving beef one day and chicken the next. Dogs are opportunistic eaters. They'll usually eat what they're fed.

If you're feeding your dog a very low-end brand of dog food, offering a variety can be good because you won't be exposing your dog to the same chemicals, additives, and preservatives day after day. But if you're feeding him a premium, all-natural brand, this is not an issue.

If you still want to pamper your dog with a variety of flavors, you can do this with treats and biscuits.

### Dog Food Selection Checklist

Here are some things to consider when choosing your dog's food:

- ◆ Does the dog food offer a well-balanced diet, using all-natural ingredients?
- ◆ When reading the food's packaging, do you understand what all of the ingredients are?
- ◆ Is the manufacturer reputable?
- ◆ Are you feeding your dog the correct amount of food, based on his age, weight, and activity level?
- ◆ Are you keeping your dog's diet consistent? Try to avoid mixing or replacing dog food brands too often.

## The Right Amount of Food

It's important to feed your dog the right amount of food each day so he can maintain a healthy weight. Your veterinarian, the food's packaging, and the manufacturer's web site will be able to offer you guidance about how much and how often to feed your dog. Puppies, for example, often require several small meals throughout the day, while older dogs can be fed once or twice per day. There are some dogs who will eat a few bites here and there throughout the day, but refuse to stick to a strict eating schedule. Whatever feeding schedule works for your dog, go with it.

To figure out how much to feed, start with the guidelines on the dog food's packaging. But keep in mind that the guidelines are based on averages and can vary based on the energy and the activity level of your dog. The quantity

of food you should give your dog will vary, based on the brand of dog food, your dog's age, his weight, how active he is, and even how cold it is outside. Watch his weight, and adjust his portions accordingly.

One of the benefits of a premium dog food is that your dog usually needs to eat less of it because it's more nutrient dense. This means better health, less expense—and less cleaning up after the dog.

*Tip* Some dogs will stop eating when they're full. Others rely on their owners to keep them from overeating and becoming fat. Early in your dog's life, get to know his personality and eating habits.

## The Raw Diet Option

When it comes to feeding your favorite pooch, one of the most expensive options—but one that proponents say is the healthiest—is a raw food diet. The idea behind this type of diet is that for millions of years, wild dogs (and, in fact, all carnivorous animals) did not have owners who cooked their foods. It therefore stands to reason that dogs have evolved to be healthiest on a raw diet. By offering your dog raw (and absolutely fresh) beef, turkey, chicken, bones, whole eggs, fresh vegetables, fruits, and other healthy ingredients, you're providing your dog with the diet nature meant for him to have.

Raw diets are controversial, though, because not everyone believes raw meat is safe for dogs. Handling raw meat safely is also tricky. There are good arguments both for and against a raw diet, and it's definitely a good idea to do some more research before you decide to go raw.

What about cooking the meat? The problem here is that few people are willing or have the time to prepare complete, well-balanced meals for their dog every day. Dogs cannot live by meat alone, and if you prepare meals that lack some necessary ingredients, or those ingredients aren't fresh, your dog won't have a well-balanced diet, and he could ultimately become malnourished or ill. And if you buy a prepackaged, frozen raw diet, you're still relying on the manufacturer to make sure all the ingredients are appropriate and fresh.

A variety of dog food companies sell raw food diets. Each meal comes premixed, individually packaged, and frozen, with all of the ingredients for a well-rounded diet. To ensure your dog's health, however, the raw diet you offer must be well balanced and contain all of the nutrition he needs, which is why it's important to select the right raw food diet from a reputable company that offers a top-quality food.

Premium raw food diets can cost \$5 or more per meal. To ensure maximum freshness, many of the companies that sell raw food diets tend to be small and only have regional distribution. However, many will ship the frozen meals directly to your home, weekly or every other week. Your veterinarian should be able to provide you with a referral. Before starting your dog on a raw food diet, or any new diet, consult with a veterinarian.

## Premium Dog Foods

In addition to the many dog foods you'll find at your local supermarket and pet supply superstore, including Iams, Eukanuba, Pro Plan, and Hill's Science Diet, the following are just some of the premium dog foods currently available that can help keep your dog healthy and well fed.

## Innova

**Manufacturer:** Natura Pet Products, Inc.

**Phone:** (800) 532-7261

**Web site:** [www.naturapet.com](http://www.naturapet.com)

**Availability:** Online and from independent pet food and supply stores nationwide

If someone offered you fresh turkey, chicken, herring, apples, potatoes, carrots, whole eggs, and a variety of other fresh fruits and vegetables, you'd know you were eating right. Since 1990, these are just some of the all-natural ingredients that are in Innova's dog foods.

Innova uses fresh, whole ingredients from the five food groups, plus it adds probiotics and prebiotics for improved digestion and intestinal health. To maintain and improve your dog's skin and coat, omega-6 and omega-3 essential fatty acids are part of the food's formula, which is prepared using a three-stage cooking method developed to lock in natural flavors and nutrients.

By combining the right amount of human-grade, fresh, USDA-inspected meat, dairy, vegetables, fruits, and grains into every serving, Innova dog foods have superior quality and nutritional value with no added chemicals. Innova comes in a variety of dry and canned formulas, including Adult, Senior, Puppy, and Large Breed. To complement this healthy diet, Natura also makes Innova Healthbars as treats.

Some of the ingredients you *won't* find in Innova that are often found in other pet foods include meat meal, soybean meal, chicken by-products, poultry by-products, animal fat, poultry fat, rice flour, corn flour, wheat flour, rice bran, corn bran, peanut hulls, artificial flavors, artificial colors, BHA, BHT, and ethoxyquin.

For the organically inclined, Natura also makes Karma dry and canned foods, which are made from all-natural, 100-percent-certified organic products. According to the company, "Natura creates its Karma line from a holistic perspective, focusing on the quality of nutrition, balance and interaction of ingredients, and the addition of select nutraceuticals that improve and protect health. The philosophy of Karma Organic Food for dogs goes beyond the nutritional benefits with its philosophy of 'Good for the Body, Good for the Soul, Good for the Environment.'"

To learn more about the company's philosophy and products, visit its web site. The site also has a store locator.

## Merrick Pet Food

**Manufacturer:** Merrick Pet Food

**Phone:** (800) 664-7387

**Web site:** [www.merrickpetcare.com](http://www.merrickpetcare.com)

**Availability:** Online and from independent pet food and supply stores nationwide

Established in the mid-1980s and based in Amarillo, Texas, Merrick Pet Care is a family-owned business that manufactures premium-quality dog food that's distributed exclusively through upscale pet

supply stores. The company says it strives to produce the highest-quality pet foods and treats possible, using some of the best agricultural products available. The company boasts that it uses “human grade” ingredients, including fresh vegetables and fruits, plus USDA-inspected beef, buffalo, chicken, duck, lamb, trout, turkey, and venison. All of Merrick Pet Care’s products are made in the United States.

Merrick Pet Food makes both dry and canned food, plus more than a hundred varieties of treats. The wide range of flavors have delicious-sounding names such as Wilderness Blend, Smothered Comfort, Venison Holiday Stew, Wingaling, Cowboy Cookout, Senior Medley, Turducken, Puppy Plate, and Grammy’s Pot Pie. The company’s Gourmet Variety 8-Pack offers a flavorful assortment. The canned food comes in two sizes, suitable for smaller or larger dogs.

### All Dogs Need Water!

Just as important as the dog’s food is the quality of his water. Your dog should always have access to fresh drinking water. Some people give their dog only filtered or bottled water, especially if their tap water contains chemicals or additives. Some upscale pet supply stores sell flavored water or vitamin water for dogs. Doggie Springs (973-692-9007; [www.doggiesprings.com](http://www.doggiesprings.com)) is one company that makes a complete line of vitamin-enriched, flavored spring water for dogs.

Whether you decide to occasionally give your dog “enhanced” water products is up to you, but plenty of water is not optional. Replace the water in your dog’s bowl at least two or three times a day to ensure freshness. Also, especially on hot days and after rigorous activity, make sure your dog stays hydrated.

## Natural Choice

**Manufacturer:** Nutro Products, Inc.

**Phone:** (800) 833-5330

**Web site:** [www.nutroproducts.com](http://www.nutroproducts.com)

**Availability:** Online and from independent pet food and supply stores nationwide

Since 1926, Nutro Products has been developing and manufacturing premium dog food. Like all premium dog food manufacturers, Nutro’s emphasis is on using high-quality ingredients to create its three primary product lines: Nutro Max, Nutro Natural Choice, and Nutro Ultra. According to the company, “Natural Choice, for example, uses only the best ingredients that guarantee premium nutrition and superior performance. These benefits are visible in your dog’s shiny coat, healthy skin, bright

eyes, and overall look and feel of good health. . . . Our foods are naturally preserved with vitamin E. We never use chemicals like BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin, propyl gallate, or sodium hexametaphosphate.”

The company’s Ultra product line focuses on all-natural, holistic nutrition to promote a healthy immune system along with a well-balanced diet and overall good health.

Each of Nutro’s product lines comes in dry or canned varieties, plus each product line includes an adult formula, weight control formula, large breed formula, and senior formula, plus several flavors. A store locator can be found on the company’s web site.

## Prairie

**Manufacturer:** Nature’s Variety

**Web site:** [www.naturesvariety.com](http://www.naturesvariety.com)

**Availability:** Online and from independent pet food and supply stores nationwide

Instead of offering separate formulas for dogs in various age groups, Nature’s Variety has created a line of premium dry, canned, and raw foods suitable for all dogs. According to the company, “Nature’s Variety believes many commercially available diets targeted at life stages or special needs (such as puppy, senior, large breed, weight control) are, in effect, formulation corrections designed to overcome nutritional deficiencies inherent in largely grain-based diets. These nutritional deficiencies arise from least-cost manufacturing practices that utilize large amounts of low-cost grain by-products, such as gluts. Gluts are generally included in kibble diets as a low-cost option to increase the protein content of the food without adding more meat. For this reason, Nature’s Variety offers a nutritionally dense kibble formula that is appropriate for all life stages, based on high meat protein content and whole grains.”

Unlike some other premium dog food companies, Nature’s Variety’s many formulas and flavors are designed to be rotated to provide your dog with optimal nutrition. For example, the company’s dry kibble products come in Chicken and Rice Medley, Beef and Barley Medley, Lamb and Rice Medley, and New Zealand Venison Medley. The company reports, “The rotation regimen can play a role in building a healthier immune system, dental health, and addressing many common health

concerns, such as food intolerance, obesity, allergies, digestive problems, and diabetes, some of which have been linked to continuous consumption of carbohydrate-based diets only.”

As you’d expect from a premium dog food company, the manufacturing facilities owned and operated by Nature’s Variety are built to USDA food standards for humans.

In addition to beef, fish, and chicken, some of the dozens of all-natural and healthy ingredients you’ll find in Nature’s Variety dog food include

*Tip* Store your dog’s dry food in a sealed container at room temperature. Canned food can also be stored at room temperature until it’s opened. Once opened, the unused portion of food should be refrigerated. Although dry dog food can sit out for a while, never leave uneaten canned food out for more than a few hours. Throw it out and replace it with fresh food, as needed.



alfalfa sprouts, apples, blueberries, broccoli, spinach, brown rice, carrots, flaxseed, honey, kelp, sweet potatoes, and wheat sprouts.

To help you formulate the right combination of foods and calculate the appropriate amount to feed your dog daily, be sure to visit the Nature's Variety web site, which offers interactive feeding guidelines. Click on the "Amount to Feed" icon.

## Dick Van Patten's Natural Balance Pet Foods

**Manufacturer:** Natural Balance Pet Foods, Inc.

**Phone:** (800) 829-4493

**Web site:** [www.naturalbalanceinc.com](http://www.naturalbalanceinc.com)

**Availability:** From independent pet food and supply stores nationwide.

Actor and entrepreneur Dick Van Patten is a founder of Natural Balance Pet Foods, a company that creates extremely healthy diets for carnivores in zoos worldwide. More recently, Natural Balance Pet Foods developed foods for dogs and cats. On the company's web site, Van Patten explains, "My partners and I started Natural Balance Pet Foods more than sixteen years ago with the intention of developing the finest, healthiest pet food on the market. We wanted a pet food based on sound scientific principles and truth, not marketing hype. We did it! Not only for dogs and cats, but for large carnivores, such as lions, tigers, polar bears, and wolves in zoos and animal reserves worldwide. . . . Our Ultra Premium Formulas for dogs are scientifically formulated for all life stages, from puppies through adulthood. Our allergy formulas are made especially for puppies and dogs with specific allergies."

### Celebrity Dog Food

Speaking of celebrities in the dog food business, Newman's Own Organics is a line of premium, organic dog food developed by the company owned by actor Paul Newman (now famous for his salad dressings and other gourmet foods for people). All the dog foods in the company's product line contain no genetically modified organisms and are produced without the use of herbicides or artificial fertilizers. Also, no chemical additives or preservatives are used. More than 70 percent of all ingredients used in the formulation of all Newman's Own Organic foods are organic.

The company offers both dry and canned dog food in adult and senior formulas. The dry foods are packaged in 5-, 12.5- and 25-pound bags, and the canned foods come in 12.7-ounce cans. Chicken and rice is the company's most popular flavor. A variety of healthy treats are also available. See the company's web site ([www.newmansownorganics.com](http://www.newmansownorganics.com)) for more information or to find a store near you.

Included in the company's dog food product line are Ultra Premium Dry Dog Foods, Ultra Premium Canned Formulas, Reduced Calorie Dry Formula, and Organic Formulas. They also make several flavor blends, such as Potato and Duck Dry Formula, Sweet Potato and Fish Dry Formula, Vegetarian Dry Formula, and Venison and Brown Rice Dry Formula.

Natural Balance Pet Foods offers top-quality canned foods, as well, in four flavors. Eatables canned food is designed to be eaten on its own or with the dry foods. It comes in adult and puppy varieties.