

Plants for Pet Friends

As you plan your upcoming garden, keep in mind the four-legged friends that bring such joy to classrooms and homes. Many pets benefit from having fresh fruits and vegetables added to their diets; however, not all edibles enjoyed by us humans are safe for all pets. Below is a rundown of some of the best fruit and vegetable choices for different types of pets, as well as those to avoid.

Always start with small quantities of new foods and watch pets carefully for adverse reactions; contact your veterinarian if needed. Reach out to an expert or your veterinarian about the types and quantities of foods best suited to your pet, as well as with any questions or concerns. Also, keep in mind that anything you grow with the intention of feeding to pets should not be sprayed with pesticides or herbicides — even organic ones.



Dogs

Scientists trace the ancestry of domestic dogs back to an ancient, now-extinct population of wolves. Although modern wolves are considered mainly carnivores (animals that feed mainly on animal flesh), they supplement their diets with insects and eggs as well as plant matter such as tree fruits, berries, and grasses. Selectively bred from wolves by hunter-gatherers starting about 14,000 years ago, dogs were the first animal to be domesticated by humans. It is this long association with humans that led to the domestic dogs' increased tolerance of plant-based foods compared to their wolf ancestors, and thus their classification as omnivores (**animals** that regularly consume significant quantities of both plant and animal matter).

Many dogs enjoy accompanying their humans into the garden, and, if left unattended, they'll often help themselves to the bounty. Most of the time, the only negative is your reduced or damaged harvest. However, some popular garden crops are unsafe for dogs to eat.

The following vegetables and fruits are safe for dogs and filled with nutrients. That said, it's best to introduce them in small quantities at first, and always feed them in moderation as a supplement to their veterinarian-approved diet. In general, avoid canned vegetables, which are often high in sodium and may contain added seasonings. Watch for and avoid added sugars, too, especially with frozen and dried fruits.

Bananas: raw and dried
Blueberries: raw and dried
Carrots: raw and cooked
Cranberries: raw and dried (though dogs may not like the tart taste)
Cucumbers
Green beans: raw and cooked
Lettuce
Melons, such as cantaloupe: remove seeds first
Peas: raw and cooked

Peppers (sweet/bell): raw and cooked
Pumpkin: peeled and cooked (canned pumpkin puree is a good option, but avoid pumpkin pie filling that contains added sugar and spices)
Raspberries
Strawberries
Sweet potatoes: cooked
Winter squash: peeled and cooked
Zucchini: raw and cooked

Brassica-family plants, such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and cauliflower, are safe for dogs to munch on in moderation (both

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raw and cooked). However, feeding dogs too much of these can cause bloating, gastrointestinal upset, and flatulence.

The following foods are safe for dogs, with some caveats:

Apples, cherries, mangoes, peaches, pears: The flesh of these fruits is fine, but remove the seeds and pits, which contain toxins.

Citrus: The flesh is fine (avoid seeds and peels) although most dogs don't enjoy the smell or taste of citrus fruits.

Corn: Although the kernels are okay for dogs, the cobs present a choking hazard and risk of intestinal blockage.

Tomatoes: Ripe tomatoes are generally safe in small quantities; avoid green tomatoes because they contain solanine, a substance that is toxic in large quantities.

Avoid giving the following to dogs: avocado, garlic, grapes/raisins, hot peppers, onions, rhubarb. And although store-bought white/button mushrooms are probably fine, don't let your dog eat any wild mushrooms.

*Make sure that the greens you harvest from dandelions in your lawn have not been sprayed with lawn chemicals of any kind.

Learn more:

[Fruits and Vegetables Dogs Can or Can't Eat](#), American Kennel Club

[Growing Fruits and Vegetables for Your Dog](#) (includes a recipe for Homemade Fruit and Veggie Sticks for Dogs), Michigan State University Extension

Cats

Unlike omnivorous dogs, cats are carnivores and thrive on a meat-rich diet. That said, the vegetables listed above as safe for dogs are also considered safe for cats. They should comprise a smaller portion of your cat's diet — that is, if your cat will agree to eat them at all.

Many cats enjoy munching on young grass shoots, and growing a pot of wheatgrass is an easy way to provide them with a nutritious treat. Seeds marketed as catgrass may include seeds for wheat, barley, and oats, as well as other grasses.

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*), a member of the mint family, is a rugged perennial herb hardy in USDA zones 3-9. Many cats love the smell of the essential oil contained in the plant's leaves and stems and others are indifferent to it. Note that some cats are stimulated by catnip, while others may act sedated. Ingestion can cause vomiting in some cats. Growing catnip is easy — it thrives in moist, well-drained soil and full to part sun. Don't be surprised if your cats lie down and roll around in the plants. You can also harvest the leaves and dry them to make your own cat toys. Catnip (and related plant catmint) are considered invasive in some areas; you can grow them in containers to prevent their spread.

Learn more about [growing wheatgrass](#).

Rabbits and Guinea Pigs

According to [Rabbit.org](#), fresh vegetables should make up approximately 10% of an adult pet rabbit's diet. Leafy greens, such as arugula, chard, dandelion greens*, kale, lettuce, and spinach, as well as carrot tops and wheatgrass, are all good choices. Other good options include beets, sweet/bell peppers, carrots, cucumbers, green beans, peas, and zucchini. These same foods are also suitable for guinea pigs.

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Learn more:

[Best Vegetables for Rabbits: A Healthy Diet Guide](#)

[Guinea Pig Safe Veggie List](#)

Reptiles

The diets required by reptilian pets vary with species, so always do your research and consult with a veterinarian or other specialist to ensure the proper food types and quantities.

In general, herbivorous reptiles (those that eat plant-based foods), including some types of iguanas, lizards, and tortoises, enjoy a diet that includes nutrient-dense greens, such as collards, dandelion greens*, mustard greens, and/or turnip greens. A small portion of their diets can include shredded carrots and squash, as well as zucchini and sweet (bell) peppers.

Omnivorous reptiles, such as bearded dragons and some turtles, can be fed the above foods, though their diets should include insects such as brown crickets.

*Make sure that the greens you harvest from dandelions in your lawn have not been sprayed with lawn chemicals of any kind.

Common Plants that are Toxic

You might be surprised at how many familiar garden plants are toxic to pets — and people! For example, avoid planting the following, because one or more of these plant parts are toxic: angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia* and *Datura* species), castor beans (*Ricinus communis*), foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), holly (*Ilex* species), monkshood (*Aconitum* species), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), and yews (*Taxus* species).

Learn more:

[Common Poisonous Plants and Plant Parts](#) (Texas A & M)

[Poisonous Plants: Toxic and Non-Toxic Plants List](#)

(ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center Phone Number: (888) 426-4435)

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