



Sprouts for Pets

Crunchy Nutrition Animals Will Love

by Sandra Murphy

Despite their small size, sprouts pack a nutritional wallop with vitamins, minerals, amino acids, enzymes, antioxidants and protein. Dogs, birds, horses and even cats enjoy the crunch, as well as the health benefits.

Cats

Notorious for being picky eaters, cats might balk at sprouts being added to their regular diet. Rather than upsetting the status quo, grow sprouts like alfalfa or barley on a handy windowsill for grazing. “My cats prefer self-serve,” observes veterinarian Carol Osborne, owner of the Chagrin Falls Veterinary Center & Pet Clinic, in Ohio. “Now they leave my house plants alone.” Both cats and dogs may show improved gastric intestinal health as a result.

Dogs

Dogs are more accepting of new content in their food bowl. “Add just a few sprouts so a dog gets used to the slightly bitter taste. Once acclimated, one-eighth to one-quarter cup daily per 20 pounds of the pet’s weight is the rule of thumb,” says Osborne.

She counsels against serving Fido onion, garlic, corn or mushroom sprouts. Peas, sunflowers, radishes, alfalfa and clover are suggested; they are all tasty and easy to grow.

Birds

“We encourage people to make their own sprouts. It’s easy to get quality seeds for legumes or grains from Whole Foods, *BobsRedMill.com* or *Nuts.com*,” says Ann Brooks, president of the all-volunteer



Phoenix Landing Foundation, in Asheville, North Carolina. They provide educational activities and facilitate adoption of birds, from parakeets to macaws. Sprouts from the store can be risky, because of bacteria, she cautions. “If not growing your own, the only one I recommend is the organic crunchy mix from *SunnyCreekFarm.com*. Be sure to



Benoit Deaust/Shutterstock.com
marjonas/Shutterstock.com

get the freshest date possible.”

“One of my favorite sprouts is mung beans, because they appear in two days or less. Birds like the crunch,” says Brooks. “Sprouts are safe to leave in the cage all day because they are live foods.”

Horses

When adding sprouts to a horse’s regular diet, it’s important to balance the intake. “A lot of barns feed forage three times a day. I know of a couple that feed one meal of sprouts and the other two of hay,” says Clair Thunes, Ph.D., a consulting equine nutritionist with Summit Equine Nutrition in Sacramento, California. “Several companies sell systems for large-scale growing.” The sprouts grow with matted roots in what is called a biscuit, weighing about 18 pounds. Difficult to mix with other feed, the biscuits are fed separately, roots and all.

“Because of sporadic drought conditions, the idea of growing your own fodder became more popular, thinking it might make forage supply more dependable and possibly cheaper after initial startup costs,” Thunes explains. “Owners

Sprouting Tips

- ✓ Always use organic seeds. *SproutHouse.com* and *Rareseeds.com* are additional sources.
- ✓ Seeds sprout in water or soil. Avoid direct sunlight.
- ✓ Practice good hygiene to avoid bacteria. Rinse seeds several times a day to prevent mold. Once the sprouts show a bit of green, dry them to remove excess moisture before refrigerating.
- ✓ Refrigerate for up to a week for peak freshness, but no longer.
- ✓ Use a mix of seeds or one kind at a time. Discard any seeds that don’t sprout with the rest.
- ✓ Sunflower seeds produce a particularly high volume of sprouts.



have a sense of control over what the horse eats, there’s less reliance on a supplier and the seeds are less expensive than hay. Due to moisture and nutritional differences, you can’t swap sprouts and hay pound for pound. It’s best to consult a veterinarian or nutritionist.” Sprouts contain a lot of moisture and have an inverted calcium phosphorus ratio that has to be accounted for she says.

Horses enjoy barley, sunflower and flax sprouts for variety. The high moisture

content may help reduce the risk of intestinal impaction and resulting colic.

Good for All

“Sprouts are a healthy form of nutrition and a hip way for both pets and people to enjoy greens,” says Osborne. “They’re a great go-to powerhouse of nutrition, often more nutritious than the adult plant.”

Connect with freelance writer Sandra urphy at StLouisFreelanceWriter@mind-spring.com.