

Cuisine *de* Critters

By Phil Tripp (Pet Chef)



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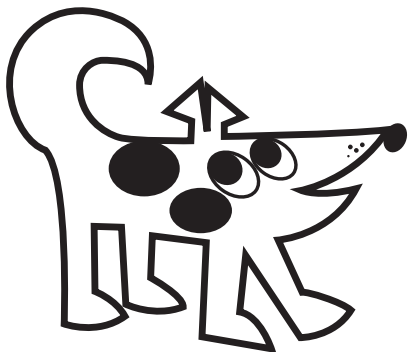
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The reaction has been overwhelming to our first two issues' columns on making healthy food and treats for your pet with a number of interesting recipes and suggestions. However, we're finding that some of the ingredients that some people use (because they taste good to them and would seem harmless) may cause problems, either simply digestive or potentially poisoning. And this varies between dogs, cats and birds.

Of course chocolate is a poison to all but what you may not know about some foods is how they can cause severe reactions in pets if they are fed to them. So before we launch into this edition's recipes, a few words to the wise. For all animals, chocolate, cocoa, coffee and alcoholic beverages are toxic as are any compounds containing caffeine, even some teas.

Though fruits are good for pets, grapes, raisins and grapeseed oil should be avoided because they can lead to renal failure in dogs. Avocados, because of their high fat content, can cause stomach upset, vomiting and pancreatitis in dogs while birds can be poisoned by chewing on the seed and even the flesh is harmful to them. Onions are a no no and mushrooms can cause problems too. Don't think you're dumb because you didn't know this... I fed grapes to my dog until I found out and wasn't savvy that onions could cause anemia.

Another potential problem is animal grade peanuts. Peanut hulls can be deadly because they can contain a fungus (Aflatoxin) that causes hepatitis in dogs. The fungus in peanuts is also deadly to birds. So it's odd that one prescription dog food company uses 26% peanut hulls as filler and I spotted another one at the vet today that had 12% peanut hulls as well as soy hulls. Not quite so surprising was the use of 'cellulose' which is generally another word for wood fibre.

This comes down to the issue of human grade foods vs animal feeds. Sometimes I swear my birds eat better than I do because we pick a variety of fresh fruit and veggies, wash everything to get pesticides and preservatives off as well as getting nuts and seeds of the highest quality. Animal grade products have higher tolerances of contaminants and their storage may accelerate bacteria or fungal growth in the foods as well as staleness or rancidity.

We found out at the vet today that our feeding over the years of canned sardines to our now 10 year old dog—and we're talking the 60 cent a can variety—as well as other fish products, has certainly kept her bones in good nick as well as her overall health. We've also added brewers yeast to her diet, the occasional egg and of course, meaty bones, marrow bones and some raw food. The dog and birds also get a limited amount of yogurt and cottage cheese at times.

So on to some wholesome treats you can make at home. The muffins we freeze in tight Ziploc bags and microwave briefly, the cheese biscuits can also be stored frozen.

Sweet Potato Muffins

Ingredients:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup wholemeal flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped nuts
- 1/2 cup chopped dates
- 2 eggs with shells
- 3/4 cup milk
- 1 cup cooked mashed sweet potatoes
- 1/4 cup melted butter

(Optional-if your birds love, as ours do, add thinly sliced chili peppers with the seeds to the wet mix. You can also grate in a bit of cheese into the mix-no more than 1/4 cup.)

Method:

Mix first seven ingredients together. Wash eggs and blenderize including the shells. Add the egg mixture to the remaining moist ingredients and stir. Stir together with dry ingredients until just combined. Spoon into greased muffin tins and bake at 220C for about 25 minutes or until just springy to the touch.

We've got a couple of bird treat books that we've purchased overseas but rather than reveal those in this issue, we direct you to an excellent book titled 'Feeding Your Pet Bird' by Petra Bergman (Barron Books ISBN # 0812015215) which is also through Amazon for US\$9.71 (normally US\$12.95) but I've also seen it at Borders Books in Australia. It's heavy on the importance of nutrition across a range of bird species—softbills, hookbills, parrots, budgies, cockatiels, lorries, amazons and macaws as examples—but also gives symptoms of poor feeding as well as supplementing commercial bird food with essential nutrients.

I found it valuable, along with dietary information from Sally Blanchard's website for Companion Parrot Quarterly (www.companionparrot.com) magazine which hipped me to the nutrition needs as well as dos and don'ts in bird feeding. Our reward in taking the time to pick up the knowledge as well as care in preparation is the fantastic health and luster of our parrots. Plus, they get immense pleasure from tearing up some of their treats which may be as simple as nut butter rolled in flatbread pieces, green leafy vegetables toothpicked and rolled around fruit pieces or other delights. Like Veggie Man!

Chowhound Cheese Biscuits

Ingredients:

- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 cup unbleached white flour
- 1/4 cup cornmeal
- 1/4 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup cheddar cheese (grated or bought in pre-grated packs)
- 1 large egg
- 3/4 cup water (optional crumbled or crushed dried live treats as 'chips')

Method:

Preheat oven to 180C. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and knead together until evenly mixed. Place some extra flour on a flat surface and roll out dough flat to half a centimetre thickness. You can sprinkle with a little extra Parmesan cheese (or optional liver treat bits) and cut into treat size biscuits, using cookie cutters if you wish. Bake for 30 minutes or until golden brown.

These also go over well with cats! And switch the liver component to a small amount of sunflower seed for parrots.

Tabby's Tuna Tidbits

Ingredients:

- 1 medium size can of tuna (150-185 grams) in water
- 1/4 cup of water drained from tuna
- 3 Tablespoons cooked egg white, chopped
- 1/4 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 cup whole wheat flour

Method:

Preheat oven to 180C. Drain tuna and measure out the tuna water. Combine tuna, tuna water and egg white and mix well. Add flour and cornmeal and mix to form a dough. Knead into a ball and roll to half a centimetre thick. Cut into 3cm squares. Bake for 20 minutes or until they develop a nice brown colour. Cool on a wire rack then store in an airtight container. And yes, dogs love them too!

"Life expectancy would grow by leaps and bounds if green vegetables smelled as good as bacon."

- Doug Larson