

What to look for in a good dog food – A Blue House Guide

Dogs come in all shapes and sizes and have very different lifestyles. Our aim should be to feed them a food as close to their natural diet as possible with consideration to their size and activity levels. Not all diets will suit every dog, so make sure you choose something that works for your dog. There are many options, but the majority of people will opt for a dry, complete dog food, maybe with some additional meat added in. Other options would include raw feeding (Raw Meaty Bones), BARF (Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods), home cooked diets and tinned foods. All have their own pros and cons, but as the majority of people will choose at least in part to feed a dry food, that is what we will concentrate on.

The natural carnivore diet consists of predominantly meat. Meat is high in (animal) protein, contains moderate amounts of fat, is low in carbohydrate and rich in moisture. This is what we aim to replicate when selecting a diet for our dogs.



Protein is the most expensive ingredient in pet food, especially if it comes from high quality muscle meat. Some manufacturers will use a lot of cereal-based protein in their foods to boost total protein levels. Cereals (wheat, maize, rice) contribute to carbohydrate AND protein content.



We prefer foods with a named animal source as the main protein ingredient, rather than cereal-based sources. This is because a dog's digestive system is not designed to digest cereals as effectively, and sometimes can even cause problems for your pet. Ideally you need a diet that contains 30-35% protein, with the main protein source listed as animal meat.

Diets high in carbohydrate are closely linked to obesity and certain bowel disorders in dogs. Wheat and gluten are also implicated in a number of skin and bowel disorders.

Grain-free diets are not necessarily low in carbohydrate, because other ingredients such as potato, sweet potato and peas can also contribute to carbohydrate levels. Wet foods can have a high carbohydrate content too - their appearance to look like meat is produced by adding water to a diet that may still contain large amounts of cereal and as little as 4% meat!

Any meat used by pet food manufacturers is always fit for human consumption. However, it usually consists of the parts of the animal not normally consumed by people. These are usually listed on the label as 'meat and animal derivatives'. This allows for variations in the food content due to fluctuations in supply of ingredients – i.e. no one batch may be exactly the same. If your pet has a sensitive stomach, it would be best to feed a diet with a fixed recipe and named ingredients.

Obesity is becoming a very common problem amongst many of our pets. It is important to remember that the recommended daily amount printed on the packaging may be more than your dog requires: it is only intended as a guide. Neutered dogs require fewer calories than un-neutered dogs. Very active dogs will also need more calories when compared to a dog that spends more time inside. It is also a good idea to weigh the food, as handfuls can vary day to day! Also remember to feed less if your dog regularly gets treats or chews.

What are we at Blue House looking for in a good, appropriate food for dogs?

- A diet that is complete and balanced.
- High percentage of good quality meat content (think of a dog's natural diet – mainly meat).
- Protein percentage 30-35%.
- Low carbohydrate content (because carbohydrates are more difficult for dogs to digest).
- Carbohydrate component with low GI (glycaemic index), low in allergens, high in soluble fibre and antioxidants.
- Grain free (to avoid grain-related allergies).
- Easily digestible (reduced incidence of upset tummies).
- Appropriate additions (such as glucosamine / chondroitin / botanicals).
- No artificial colours or flavours, no growth hormones, no dairy, no GM ingredients, no gluten, no chemical preservatives.
- Reasonable price.
- Tasty!
- British made and sourced where possible.

Here at Blue House, we have spent a long time looking for diets that fulfil these criteria! The ones we have found all contain a high protein content with listed animal protein sources. We currently stock Canagan, Applaws and Orijen. There are other good foods out there but they are not always easy to recognise! Hopefully this factsheet will help you when you next look at a bag of dog food – how does your dog's food measure up?

As an example, here is the ingredients list from **Canagan** (chicken puppy / adult variety):

COMPOSITION

Freshly Prepared Deboned Chicken (26%), Dried Chicken (25%), Sweet Potato, Peas, Potato, Pea Protein, Alfalfa, Chicken Fat (3.1%), Dried Egg (3.1%), Chicken Gravy (1.6%), Salmon Oil (1.2%), Minerals, Vitamins, Glucosamine (1000 mg/kg), MSM (1000 mg/kg), Apple, Carrot, Spinach, Psyllium, Seaweed, Fructo-oligosaccharides, Chondroitin (700 mg/kg), Camomile, Peppermint, Marigold, Cranberry, Aniseed & Fenugreek.



And then from **Bakers** (Complete with Beef and country vegetables variety)

COMPOSITION

Cereals, Meat and animal derivatives (Minimum 4% fresh meat in the soft moist kernel, minimum 4% beef in the brown kernel), Vegetable protein extracts, Oils and fats, Various sugars, Derivatives of vegetable origin, Minerals, Vegetables (minimum 4% vegetables in the green and yellow kernels). With antioxidants, coloured with and preserved with EC additives.



As you can see, the ingredients are very different. Dogs can survive on almost whatever we feed them – however it does not necessarily make them as healthy as they could be. In know which one I would prefer to feed my dog (and it isn't Bakers).

Please ask any of our staff for more information if you are interested.

