



Top Ten Fruits and Veggies for Your Best Friend

by Audi Donamor

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. This is true, not only for you, but for your companion animals too. In fact, providing your dog or cat with a variety of nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables can help him live a healthier, longer life, even reducing the risk of certain diseases, including cancer.

Choose orange, red, yellow, and other brightly colored fruits and vegetables to support your animal companions' daily diet. Buy organic produce whenever possible, and say "no" to dyed, waxed, irradiated and genetically engineered items. This is particularly important because the skin on fruits and vegetables is usually the most concentrated source of nutrients, so you don't want to have to remove it.

Our animals do not have the necessary enzymes to break down cellulose walls, which are indigestible carbohydrates found in the outer layers of fruits and vegetables like apples, broccoli, green beans, and carrots. We have to break down the walls for them, so these power-packed foods become as bio-available as possible. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways:

- A food processor, blender, or grinder can quickly create a wonderful purée for your feline and canine family members. Most fruits just need a fast spin in a processor.
- Cooking and steaming vegetables will also break down the cellulose walls.
- Juicing produces lots of fantastic pulp. Visit your local organic juice bar or health food store, and ask if you can have some of their extra pulp. The pulp freezes beautifully, so you always have something on hand when you can't do the work yourself, and you can use it as a base for wonderful frozen treats and biscuits.

The following ten fruits and vegetables are major players when it comes to the health and well being of our feline and canine family members.

1. Carrots

The carrot is one of the kings of the vegetable patch. There are over 100 varieties, from deep purple and white to the brilliant orange we are most accustomed to. Each is a storehouse of nutrient power that's good for our canine and feline friends. Carrots contain pro-vitamin A (beta-carotene), vitamins B, C, D, E and K, riboflavin, niacin, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, sodium, iron, magnesium, manganese, sulphur, copper, and iodine. They support the immune system, aid digestion, and are also recognized as a glandular tonic, skin cleanser & eye conditioner.

For your feline friend, try some cooked puréed carrot. Consider parboiled carrots for a teething puppy. For trips on the road, you can even try Frontier 100% organic carrot powder.

2. Broccoli

Broccoli, a phyto nutrient-dense member of the cruciferous family, is a low glycemic vegetable king pin. This means it does not cause a rapid rise in blood glucose levels. Broccoli contains lots of vitamin C and beta-carotene, as well as vitamins A and D. It is one of the most important cancer fighting vegetables. It contains no fewer than three cancer protective biochemicals, including sulforaphane, which boosts the immune system.

Other members of the cruciferous family include Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, rutabagas, kohlrabi, bok choy, kale, Swiss chard, collards, and turnips. Clinical studies are currently examining the role of cruciferous vegetables and their possible link to lower cancer rates.

Broccoli should be fed in moderation, because it can depress thyroid function if fed in large amounts. When it comes to the cruciferous family, try cooked rather than raw, because cooking releases indole, a cancer fighting enzyme.

3. Green Beans

Green beans are considered one of the world's healthiest foods. They are an excellent source of vitamin A because of their concentration of carotenoids, including beta-carotene. Green beans also include vitamins C and K, calcium, copper, fiber, folic acid, iron, magnesium, manganese, niacin, phosphorus, potassium, protein, riboflavin, thiamin, and Omega-3 fatty acids. Vitamin K stands out because it is important for maintaining strong bones. Vitamin K-1 activates osteocalcin, the major non-collagen protein in bone, and acts as an anchor for calcium molecules inside bones. Green beans are heart smart, too.

4. Pumpkin

If your canine or feline companion is experiencing occasional bouts of constipation or diarrhea, pureed pumpkin may be just what the doctor ordered. It's a terrific stool softener, which makes it a perfect remedy for constipation, often helping dogs or cats with an upset stomach or indigestion. Since pumpkin is very rich in fiber, all you have to do is add one or two teaspoons to your animal's food. The dietary fiber contained in pumpkin absorbs water, so it is also a great remedy for diarrhea. If your cat or dog is a little bit on the roly-poly side, pumpkin can help because it quickly creates a feeling of being full.

5. Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are a great source of vitamin E. They also provide many other important nutrients, including an abundance of vitamins A, B-6, and C, calcium, iron, folate, potassium, copper, thiamine, and iron. Sweet potatoes are a complex carbohydrate and another example of a beta-carotene rich vegetable, which may be a significant factor in reducing the risk of certain cancers. They are also a good source of dietary fiber and help promote a healthy gastrointestinal system.

6. Tomato

Over 72 different studies have demonstrated that tomatoes have the ability to lower the risk of some kinds of cancer. The secret to the tomato's success is lycopene, the chemical that gives tomatoes their bright red colour. Tomatoes that have been processed by cooking actually contain more lycopene, because cooking breaks down the cellular walls, allowing carotenoids to be more concentrated. To make tomatoes even more beneficial, add a little fat like cold pressed olive oil. This simple trick allows the lycopene to be even better absorbed into the body. Along with lycopene, tomatoes are also an excellent source of vitamins A and C.

7. Apples

That simple apple a day, can be used in so many ways. Apples are the perfect training treat, and applesauce is an ideal base for all kinds of biscuits as well as fruit and vegetable mixes for home cooked and raw diets. One apple contains the equivalent of about 1,500 mg of vitamin C. Researchers have found that red delicious, northern spy, and Ida red apples contain more potent disease fighting antioxidants than other red apples. In fact, red delicious were shown to have higher antioxidant levels than seven other varieties. Pectin, the fiber found in apple skins, is fermented in the intestines; this produces short-chain fatty acids that help prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and support the cells of the intestinal lining, making apples yet another excellent cancer fighting food. Keep in mind, that organic apples may contain around one-third more antioxidants than regular apples.

8. Blueberries and Cranberries

Scientists from the United States Department of Agriculture have discovered that blueberries and cranberries contain significant levels of resveratrol, a natural compound found to have anti-cancer qualities and is also believed to reduce the risk of heart disease. Blueberries are mini powerhouses of antioxidants. These antioxidants come from anthocyanins, the pigments that give blueberries their deep blue color. Like cranberries, blueberries help prevent urinary tract infections because they contain condensed tannins, the compounds responsible for keeping bacteria from attaching to the wall of the bladder. A sprinkle a day keeps UTIs at bay.

9. Cantaloupe

Cantaloupes belong to the same family as the cucumber, squash, and pumpkin. They are an excellent source of vitamin A due to their very high concentration of beta-carotene, and help support good vision. Cantaloupe is also a good source of vitamin B-6, vitamin C, fiber, folate, niacin, and potassium. Cantaloupe is considered an especially safe fruit because it is not commonly allergenic, and doesn't contain measurable amounts of goitrogens, oxalates, purines, or pesticide residues. Try giving your cat a little bit of cantaloupe with a dab of yogurt and a sprinkling of catnip.

10. Watermelon

The United States Department of Agriculture Research Service has declared that watermelon packs a more powerful lycopene punch than tomatoes—40% more, that is! Watermelon also contains vitamins A, B-6, C, and thiamin. Many of our feline friends enjoy a cold, crisp piece of watermelon.

Not all fruits and veggies are good for your animals. Here's what to avoid or limit.

- Avoid onions. The American Journal of Veterinary Research has reported that onion induced oxidation of canine red blood cells has caused severe reactions in some dogs, even those who consumed only small amounts. A sensitive dog may develop Heinz-body anemia; symptoms include, lethargy, red urine, and pale or bluish gums, especially with exercise.
- Grapes and raisins have the potential to be toxic to your canine companion. A bunch of grapes, or even just a few raisins, can lead to acute renal failure. Pesticides, heavy metals, and fungal contaminants have been ruled out as causal agents, so take extra care with this popular fruit. Symptoms of toxicity include abdominal pain, lethargy, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- Spinach and Swiss chard contain oxalic acid, a compound that interferes with calcium absorption. Serve them with care.
- Limit vegetables from the nightshade family, including eggplant, peppers, and tomatoes, as they can aggravate inflammatory conditions, like arthritis. If your canine companion has arthritis, give papaya and mango a try instead.

Tasty, Healthful Recipes for Your Animal and Human Family

Easier-than-pie Baked Granola Apples

Ingredients

4 red apples, e.g., delicious
3/4 cup granola, with no added salt or sugar
Sprinkling of cinnamon and carob

Instructions

Use organic ingredients whenever possible. Preheat oven to 350°F. Hollow out unpeeled apples. Fill each apple with granola, packing it in as tightly as you can. Place the apples in a shallow Pyrex baking dish, and sprinkle with cinnamon and carob. Bake for 30 minutes or until apples are tender. Remove baking dish from the oven and let the apples cool to room temperature. Serve plain, or add a dollop of goat milk yogurt or Balkan style yogurt. The human members of your family might enjoy adding some all-natural vanilla ice cream.

Tasty, Healthful Recipes for Your Animal and Human Family

Carrot Flan

This recipe comes from England, and the original version appeared in Juliette de Bairacli Levy's wonderful little book, *Nature's Children*. You can have lots of fun with the basic recipe, using different fruits and vegetables to suit your human and furry family's tastes.

Ingredients

2 cups finely grated raw carrot (or zucchini, sweet potato, or apples)
6 raw egg yolks
6 tablespoons filtered water (or substitute homemade broth or fruit juice for an extra nutritional & taste boost)
1/2 teaspoon sea salt

Instructions

Use organic ingredients whenever possible. Preheat oven to 350°F. Beat the egg yolks, water, and salt together. Add the grated raw carrot to the egg mixture and combine thoroughly. Turn mixture out into a greased Pyrex baking dish. Bake for approximately 30 minutes. You will know when the flan is ready when a knife inserted in the middle comes out clean. Cut into strips or squares and let the whole family enjoy this wholesome dish.

Online Sources of Information

www.nutritiondata.com

The Nutrition Data website provides nutrition facts, calorie counts, and nutrient data for all foods and recipes.

www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/

The United States Department of Agriculture Nutrient Data Laboratory is a standard reference database, absolutely packed with information.

www.dole5aday.com

The Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Facts Charts include a breakdown of dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, potassium and folate content for over 100 fruits and vegetables

www.napcc.asPCA.org

The Animal Poison Control Centre is part of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. If you ever think your animal may have been poisoned, call 1-888-426-4435; don't forget to always have your veterinarian's name and telephone number readily available, and the phone number and address for the nearest veterinary critical care centre.

Special thanks to Audi Donamor for allowing the Land of PureGold Foundation to share this article. Photo of Golden Retriever Sam enjoying his watermelon courtesy of his dad, Geoff Hendrickson.