

GRAIN-FREE DOG FOOD

What is a grain-free diet? The latest installment of Pet Gazette's dog food series looks at just a few of the popular ranges on sale

Grain free pet food seems to be enjoying high levels of interest. Just a few years ago mentioning the term would have

left some pet owners scratching their heads, but today the diets are commonly stocked by retailers. Major companies are increasingly offering brands of their own and often suggest the content has health benefits. But, what exactly does grain free mean? Products marked in this way will not contain ingredients such as corn, which may cause an intolerance in a small number of dogs. It's important to note that grain free diets may include other carbohydrates. Recipes will vary between brands, but manufacturers tend to be happy to discuss the contents of their product if stockists have any queries.

If your customers say the food looks good enough to eat they may not be far wrong - some producers source human-grade ingredients. Many of the manufacturers have expressed a commitment to only using high quality produce within their food.

POPULAR PRODUCTS

So, why are grain free diets attracting so much interest? Michael Bellingham, chief executive of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) explained: 'Grain free pet foods are becoming popular and they link in to the concept of the ancestral diet. Feeding a high protein diet is very appealing to

some owners and it can still be achieved in diets that contain some grains.'

Finding the best possible diet for each individual dog is, of course, important. It's essential to ensure every pet's nutritional requirements are fully met. Michael Bellingham advises: 'The most important consideration when deciding what diet to feed is whether it provides complete and balanced nutrition. If there is too much of one nutrient and not enough of others, it will impact on the pet's health. This principle is true regardless of whether the pet food contains grain or not.'

He continued: 'All pet foods labelled as complete must contain all the nutrients a pet needs in the right balance for healthy body function. Members of the PFMA produce their diets in line with the FEDIAF Nutritional Guidelines, these guidelines detail the nutritional needs of pets at different life stages and they are peer reviewed by veterinary experts throughout Europe.'

CHECKING FOR INTOLERANCES

Pet owners who fear their dogs may have an intolerance or specialist dietary requirements should be encouraged to seek help from a vet. Their local surgery will be able to offer advice on testing and guidance on nutrition.

PDSA Vet Vicki Larkham-Jones said: 'Any owner who has a dog with suspected gastrointestinal disease should seek help and advice from their vet on the best treatment and management of the condition. Vets can run allergy tests which can help identify underlying intolerances or allergic causes and from there, an appropriate prescription diet can be started.'

HEALTHY PETS

Dog owners purchasing grain free, or other forms of food, should always be encouraged to learn the optimum portion size for their pet. Their companion should receive all the nutrients he or she needs without consuming enough to put them at risk of overeating or obesity. The amount dogs can eat may depend on breed, life stage and

levels of activity. Once again local vets should be able to offer advice.

Fresh water is always an important consideration, especially in warmer weather. Pets should have an unlimited supply of easily accessible, clean drinking water. Now that we've reached the summer holiday season, retailers may find there is rising interest in lightweight or portable drinking and food bowls. Displaying the products alongside popular food ranges could increase the potential for add-on sales. 🐾

USEFUL CONTACTS

PDSA www.pdsa.org.uk

PFMA www.pfma.org.uk

