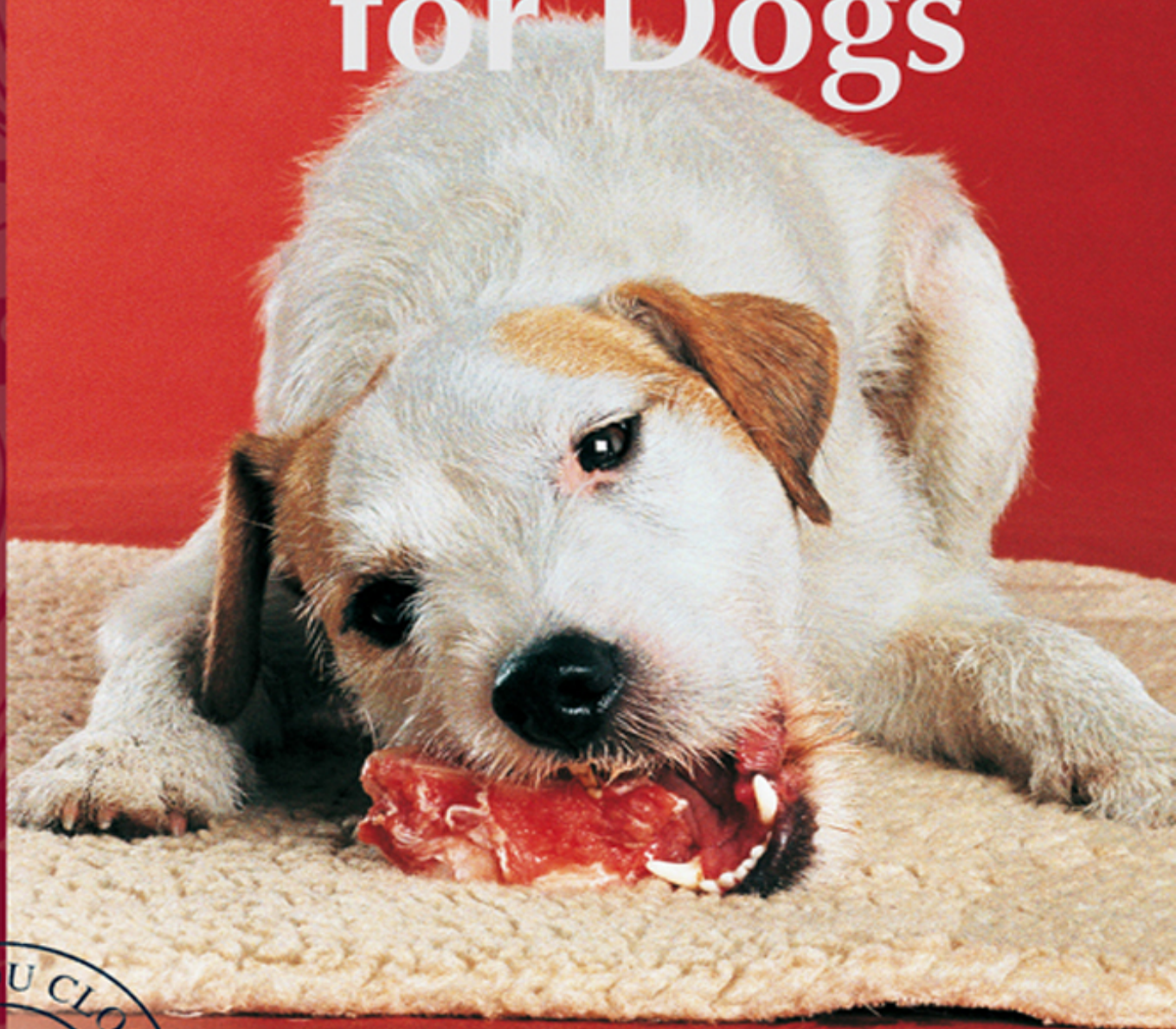


Silke Böhm

Raw Food Diet for Dogs



Feeding fresh meat
made easy!

CADMOS

Raw food diet for dogs



Raw food diet for dogs

The fresh food diet – made easy

by Silke Böhm



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Foreword: Why feed fresh foods?

When our Parson Russell terrier Yoda moved in with us in August 2003, the breeder supplied us with a starter packet of dried dog food. Having been a vegetarian for twenty years at first I was glad that dried dog food was available. After the starter pack was nearly used up, I made a few enquiries regarding the subject of diet, and was surprised to see how much the quality varied among the different dog foods on offer. This prompted me to embark on a very extensive research campaign, scouring the internet, forums, books and articles. I spent hours on the phone discussing the composition of the various pellets, croquettes and biscuits with the customer advisors of the different food manufacturers. After a prolonged period of weighing up the pros and cons, I plumped for a brand that I believed would be good for my dog.



There is a huge range of dried dog food on offer. However, the quality varies considerably.



Which vegetables and which types of meat is my dog allowed to eat?

Unfortunately my canine friend had a different opinion. At first he refused to eat it. I however remained determined. After two days Yoda ate the food, but with the proverbial 'gritted teeth'. He was a long way away from leaping up in the air upon hearing me handle the food bowl in the kitchen. Also he never ate the recommended amount. And because Yoda is a dog who tends to be rather too slim than too fat, I began to worry.

One day the owner of Yoda's dog friend Leo pushed a packet of fresh meat into my hand. As I was grating some vegetables for the first time that evening, and mixing them up with the meat, I had more than a few trepidations. A pair of eager dog eyes complete with button nose followed each and every one of my hand movements. Yoda emptied his bowl, and licked it clean until it was shiny. The pure joy of watching the dog eat with a healthy appetite should have convinced me of the advantages of a fresh food diet. But I remained sceptical. After all I am a committed vegetarian! I took up my research once more. After a relatively short period of time all my doubts had vanished; if I wanted to feed this dog in a species-appropriate manner, I would have to feed him fresh food. I started by making menu plans and inquiring about any added ingredients, oils and herbs. It took quite a long time before I arrived at my present routine.

Dog owners easily get chatting to each other, and the subject of diet will soon come up as well. People are usually very interested when I tell them that I feed my dog exclusively with fresh food. I have to answer the same questions I had asked myself at the beginning, and which I had painstakingly researched. These chats tend to centre predominantly on how to adapt the theory for everyday purposes, and how user-friendly it is. This book is a direct result of this; it is a practical introduction to the subject of

the fresh food diet for dogs, with tips, advice and practical experience.

Incidentally, many fresh food feeders will feed themselves and their families a lot more healthily after switching to fresh food for the dog. This must be due to the fact that you always have fresh vegetables in the house. I consider this to be a rather positive side effect.

The dog's digestive system

The dog is a carnivore and a direct descendant of the wolf. The wolf – just like our domestic dogs – is in fact an omnivore, even though meat is their preferred food. In their natural habitat wolves don't just eat whole animals, but also plants, such as grasses, berries, herbs, as well as fruit and vegetables.

In order to keep a dog in a way that is appropriate to the species, it is necessary to roughly follow the dietary habits of a wolf. This is due to the fact that there is virtually no difference between the digestive system of a wolf and that of a dog. Although the dog is no longer a predator in the true sense – he does not hunt, but instead gets a bowl put in front of him by his human – his digestive organs are still those of a predator. A good balance of meat and vegetables has to be provided. The wolf's usual prey consists predominantly of herbivores. Due to the fact that the stomach contents – an important source of minerals and vitamins – which we don't normally have access to, are also consumed we have to replace these components by providing a range of well thought out supplements.

Let's begin with the dog's mouth. The carnivore tears smaller pieces of meat from a larger chunk with his front teeth, and breaks them up with his molars. He is, however, not able to grind up the food in the same way as we humans

or other herbivores do; our saliva initiates the fermentation process while the food is still in the mouth.

The function of the dog's saliva, which is quite viscous compared with human saliva, is not so much to ferment the food, but rather to aid the passage of fairly large lumps of meat down into the digestive tract. The saliva coats the food like a lubricant and eases its transport into the stomach for further digestion. But first the food passes through the oesophagus. This muscular tube pumps lumps of food into the stomach mechanically. The stomach too is a muscle that is constantly moving during the digestive process in order to mix up the individual food components with digestive juices. The mucous lining of the stomach produces comparatively large amounts of hydrochloric acid which modifies the food in order to facilitate enzymatic processing. A dog's stomach can accommodate considerably more volume of food than a human's for example. In theory it would therefore be possible to feed a healthy, fully grown dog only once a day. In practice it has been shown that feeding smaller amounts of food – divided into two to three portions spread out over the day – reduces the risk of a stomach twist, while at the same time avoiding raised stress levels due to hunger.



Many dogs like to eat the odd berry during their walks.



This dog is licking his nose after a good meal.

The carnivore's stomach continuously passes small portions of food on to the intestines. How much and how often depends on the dog's activities. Because the stomach and gut are at their most active after a meal, causing the dog to be tired, he should be allowed to indulge in a siesta

after eating. The rule is that after feeding a dog must not be allowed to engage in any demanding activities for one to two hours. Ideally the interval should be even greater than that. This means that dogs who only get fed once a day should be fed as late in the evening as possible. The food mash is pushed from the stomach into the duodenum. From there the food is moved into the small intestine, followed by the large intestine, at the end of which the dog evacuates the indigestible food components. The smaller the output, the more efficiently the dog has absorbed the food.



The smaller the pile of dog poo, the more efficiently a dog has digested their food.

And you will see that after being put on a fresh food diet your dog will produce fewer, and above all, smaller piles of

poop (which is an advantage for all dog owners in urban situations where clearing up after your dog using small plastic bags is mandatory). A dog's gut is much shorter than a human's relative to their body size. This is typical for predators, who are unable to digest complex carbohydrates due to a shorter gut. Owners of dogs who like to chew on sticks will know this phenomenon – the small bits of wood that the dog swallows whilst chewing on the stick re-emerge unchanged at the other end.

The gut of each and every living being transforms food into components small enough to pass through the gut wall into the blood stream in order to supply the human or the animal organism with the required minerals and vitamins. The dog's mucous lining and digestive enzymes are somewhat more efficient than those of a human. Nevertheless they are not able to break down vegetable matter. The wolf eats the pre-digested stomach contents of his prey. In order to adapt the food to suit the dog's digestive requirements we have to break open the vegetable cells either by cooking them, or, and this would be the preferred option, by pureeing them in order to break open the cells. This is the only way the domesticated successor to the wolf is able make optimal nutritional use of his food, in order to stay healthy and active.

During the digestive process some tiny little helpers are playing an important part. These are enzymes which are produced by the stomach lining and the pancreas. These compounds break down the food components further and further, until they are small enough to be absorbed through the gut wall in order to supply the body with vital substances. In the dog's case, the part of the digestive process involving enzymes only begins once the food has reached the stomach. In humans the enzymatic digestion begins in the mouth. The dog's gut flora contains gut bacteria that are able to synthesise vitamins. Despite this

the majority of the vitamins needed have to be absorbed via the diet.

Prejudices

Some concerns regarding a fresh food diet are simply based on old prejudice. The dog food industry likes to encourage this kind of prejudice because they are worried about a decrease in demand for ready-made dog food. Some vets also advise against the feeding of fresh food, because they have not yet looked into the matter thoroughly enough. But there are signs of an increasing trend in favour of feeding fresh food among veterinarians.

The most persistent prejudice, however, must be the idea that dogs who are fed raw meat are more aggressive than dogs fed on ready-made food. Anyone willing to give this matter some thought will quickly realise that this cannot be true. What can possibly be bad about feeding a dog with the same food that their ancestor, the wolf, would eat? Wolves living wild in the forest are not aggressive animals. And even for us humans the trend is increasingly towards getting back to our roots. We strive to eat in a more consciously season-oriented way – in other words, more naturally. But does this mean that our menfolk are striding into the forest with their bows and arrows once again?