Canine care

Nutritious foods for keeping your country dog healthy and why shop-bought items may not be cutting it. *Words: Samantha Kingston*

Living the country life often includes owning dogs, and rightly so. They're fantastic companions, adore their people to bits, and force you to get outside and enjoy that country air you're so fortunate to be surrounded by. Whether you own sporting dogs, herding dogs, or simply love having dogs around no matter the breed, they all have one thing in common: their need for adequate nutrition.

Country dogs are some of the most active around. The wide-open spaces around them allow for increased activity, which is great for their physical health. However, a diet that lacks the necessary elements they need to thrive will limit their stamina and energy. This is also important to consider when it comes to maintaining a healthy weight, as well as their overall health. According to veterinary charity PDSA, dogs need to eat a complete diet that's appropriate to their life stage in order to help them grow.

Feeding dogs food that comes out of a bag or a tin can only go so far toward their nutritional requirements. Yes, they're consuming the calories they need to feel satiated, and they do get a decent amount of energy from them. That being said, there's a difference between the health of a dog that's eating a kibble- and/or tinned-food diet versus one that's being fed biologically-appropriate ingredients.

According to pet food maker ORIJEN, a biologically-appropriate diet is high in protein and low in carbohydrates. These diets are more satiating, meaning dogs will naturally consume less than they would of any conventional dry pet food. The difference between a dog that's happy and one that's thriving might not be noticeable to some,

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A HEALTHY DOG IS A HAPPY DOG, ESPECIALLY WHEN OUT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE /GETTY

but to owners that spend more time outdoors with their pets, it's obvious.

Four main ingredients that dogs benefit from (and that are missing from most commercial dog food) are fresh, lean proteins from cuts of meat; healthy fats derived from supplements such as fish oil; vitamins and minerals found in organ meats; and antioxidants provided by fruits and vegetables. The fifth ingredient is raw, meaty bones; these are beneficial for dogs' dental health and mental stimulation, while they also provide additional nutrients.

Much of this is easy to prepare (whether raw or cooked) and can be bought at your local grocer just as quickly as kibble or tinned food. Though it may take a little time, once you find a routine that works for you and your dog, it'll be just like making dinner for the family. After all, your dogs are your family too, and you want to keep them healthy for as long as you can.

The process that makes commercial dog food so convenient is exactly what makes it so much less nutritious: it's cooked beyond recognition, packed full of preservatives, and sits on a shelf for an indefinite period. While we know that processed food is lacking in nutrients for humans, many people continue to eat it. However, our dogs rely on us to supply their food, and don't really have a choice in the matter. If they did, what do you think they would choose?

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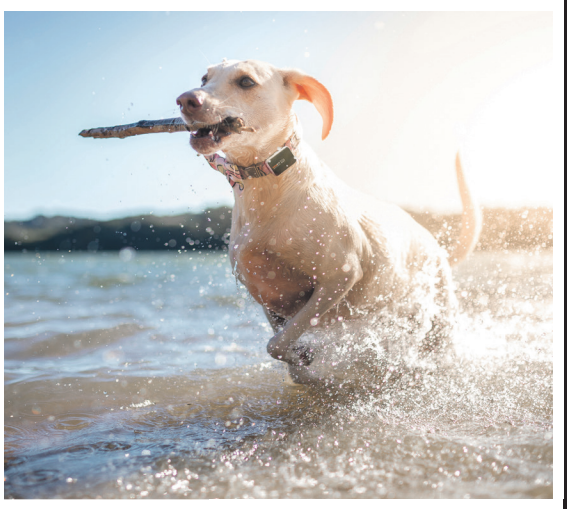

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