What Food Do Rabbits Like Most: Fresh or Synthetic Food?

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Abstract

Rabbits are herbivores and they eat a selection of different plants. Rabbits that live with people have a different diet that wild rabbits. If taken out of their natural habitat, would a rabbit resort to eating something else, go on a hunger strike or would they move to other places where the original food is abundant. This experiment will be testing the food selective behavior of captive rabbits to determine if they would revert back to their native diet.

Introduction

Rabbits are small mammals that have long ears and strong hind legs which enable them to hop. Wild rabbits can live for up to seven years and are herbivores meaning that they only eat plants and vegetables. Their diet consists of timothy hay, alfalfa, clovers, radishes, celery, carrots, and other grasses. When a rabbits food source is scarce they often resort to eating other plants or moving to other places were the food that they eat is abundant. During mid spring to late summer rabbits make nests for their babies. A rabbits nest is usually made on the ground in medium height grass and is constructed of rabbit fur and dead grass. Wild rabbits usually have around five babies and take a few months to fully mature.

The single most important item in the rabbit diet is grass hay, and it should be fed in unlimited quantities to both adults and baby rabbits. A rabbit fed only commercial rabbit pellets does not get enough long fiber to keep the intestines in good working order. The long fibers in the hay push things through the gut and keep the intestinal muscles in good tone. Alfalfa or clover hays, although tasty for the rabbit, are too rich in protein and calcium to be fed ad libitum. Instead, offer fresh grass hays such as timothy, oat, coastal,
brome, bahia or wheat. A good-quality commercial rabbit pellet provides trace nutrients, vitamins and minerals that a rabbit might not get if fed only hay and fresh foods. Pelleted food is required for good health. Many experienced rabbit veterinarians recommend no more than 1/8 cup of quality pellets per 5 lbs. of rabbit per day. A rabbit fed too many pellets will often ignore his hay, to the detriment of its intestinal system.

Pellets do not contain dried fruit, seeds, nuts, colored crunchy things or other things that are attractive to our human eyes, but very unhealthy to a rabbit. Rabbits are strict herbivores, and in nature they rarely get fruit, nuts or other such fatty, starchy foods. Fresh greens help keep intestinal contents hydrated, which makes them easier for the bunny to pass. Trace nutrients, fiber, and just plain old tastiness are other benefits of fresh greens. Broccoli, dark leaf lettuces, kale, and parsley are good food items.

Too much sugar and starch can cause cecal dysbiosis, and all its associated problems. Carrots, romaine lettuce and kale are good starters. Be sure to wash everything thoroughly to remove pesticide and fertilizer residues as much as possible. Even organic produce should be washed well to remove potentially harmful bacteria, such as E. coli. Serve the vegetables wet, as this will help increase your rabbit's intake of liquid. This helps keep the intestinal contents moving well, and the bunny healthy.

**Hypothesis**

Based on my knowledge of rabbit diet, I believe that the rabbit will like the fresh romaine lettuce better than the processed food.
Materials

- Three (3) empty feeding dishes
- 20g Romaine lettuce
- 20g Fiesta-Max Rabbit Food (preserved sun-cured Timothy Grass Hay, Sun-cured Alfalfa Hay, Oats, Dehulled Soybean Meal, Oat Hulls, Ground Oats)
- 20g Tasty twigs (preserved Flour, Soya Oil, Cottonseed Oil, Corn Syrup, Yeast, Baking Soda)

Methods

1. Measure out 20 grams of each food item
2. Pour 20 grams of each material into separate dishes.
3. Put the 3 dishes into different corners of the cage (e.g. top left corner, top right corner)
4. Observe rabbit eating for 1 hour
5. Record data of which food it consumes the most.

Data/Results

Once the rabbit was introduced to all three foods. It hopped around the cage and within a matter of minutes the rabbit was eating the lettuce. After it had eaten more than half of the lettuce it hopped around the cage again and then went right back to the lettuce and ate the rest. The rabbit later hopped over to the tasty twigs and ate about three of them. Overall the romaine lettuce was the rabbits favorite food.

Figure 1
References

