

Raw Feeding by Cory Williams (cory@carolinacotons.com)

I raw feed six dogs, and have done so for nearly a year. I have learned a lot in the process, managing to shorten my time spent preparing and shopping for food in half, and I would like to share this information. This article will focus on how to feed raw, and not on the pros and cons of the issue, which can readily be explored on the Internet. For me, there is no con: I do not have a choice, as my 100-pound Great Pyrenees, Jesse, is allergic to kibble. I am happy to report that after switching to raw, he is now completely healthy and normal. I successfully weaned him off of the six pills he took each day for his problems related to allergies. After learning how kibble is processed, and what it contains, I could not continue to feed it to any of my dogs.

I estimate that I spend between 10-20 hours each month shopping and preparing meals for six dogs. If I find a particularly good sale on meat, or if I have extra time, I often prepare several months worth of meals ahead of time and package them in individual freezer bags. My maximum cost is about one dollar per every pound of raw food that I feed.

## Resources

I really like the book, *Raw Dog Food*, by Carina Beth MacDonald. It is small, easy to read, humorous, receives good reviews, and is a nice quick-start guide. It also offers recommendations for appliances and other essentials you will need to get started. You can buy it at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), along with many other books on the topic. In my opinion, this book is really all you need to get started.

If you are Internet savvy, then Yahoo Groups hosts many discussion forums on feeding raw. Some groups are regional specific and list stores with good sales on meat, some are breed specific, while others discuss holistic dog care in general. I find the groups are a quick and easy way to get answers to my questions, and to even make a friend or two along the way.

## Supplies

The most essential item to own for raw feeding is a kitchen scale. I like the kind with a stainless-steel bowl that sets to zero after accounting for the weight of the bowl. The utensils you need are a large cutting board; good quality knives, including a cleaver and boning knife; a sharpener; large mixing bowl; freezer containers and bags; disinfecting spray to clean your surfaces; and, an apron. In addition, it is helpful to have the following appliances: a deep freeze (upright freezers are easiest); a meat grinder; and a professional blender or food processor. I was lucky enough to already own these items.

## How Much Do I Feed?

The generally accepted rule of thumb is to feed your dog two to three percent of his ideal body weight each day in raw. However, smaller dogs have higher metabolisms. I feed my

thirteen-pound dogs four-ounces of raw, two times a day. My large dog eats one pound of raw, twice a day. Weigh your dog before you switch, and monitor him for weight loss or gain, and adjust the amount you feed accordingly.

### What to Feed

I feed three-fourths meat and bones, and one-fourth of a mixture I will refer to as “veggie glop,” (recipe to follow). One meal each week consists of just a meaty bone. This keeps their teeth clean, and is also good for recreational chewing. Raw bones do not splinter like cooked bones do, and are not risky to feed. My dogs adore getting their bone-in meal. I typically feed them a small turkey neck, chicken thigh, and sometimes feed bone-in fish that is cut in portions. Pork necks are harder, and good to feed your small dog as a recreational bone. You need to supervise your dogs when eating bones, as there is always a risk of choking. My dogs have never choked on a raw bone, whereas I have a friend whose dog died from choking on a piece of cheese she fed as a treat. Some dogs try to swallow their bones whole, so just watch your dog closely at first. If a particular type of bone gives him trouble, or if he tries to eat it without chewing, then avoid feeding that bone.

### Protein Sources

You can use most any source of meat that is cheap in your area. I primarily feed chicken, turkey, pork, fish, and occasionally beef. But feed what is available to you. If you live on a pig farm feed pork; if you like to hunt or fish then feed deer, squirrel, or fish. However, I do not feed ham and other meats that are salty or cured.

Give your dog about two weeks to get used to each different protein source before adding another. During that week, he may vomit, or have loose stools but he is not really sick, just adjusting to the new diet. You can tell this because he may try to eat what was regurgitated. Let him. And, rest assured that once you have introduced each new protein that vomiting may happen, but it will end once he is used to the source. Many people like me feed raw because of allergy problems. You can pinpoint a problem food by slowly adding in protein sources. If by chance your dog is allergic to certain meat, then you will know the culprit.

### Attention Shoppers

I usually buy my meat when it is on sale, either the store’s weekly specials or the marked-down meat. This has to be used within a couple days, or immediately frozen. Take care to only thaw your meat in the refrigerator, this usually takes two-three days; or, thaw it in cold water, and then feed it as soon as it thaws so it remains fresh. You can also buy your meat at wholesale prices from a butcher or a raw-feeding co-op. Raw feeding takes forethought and planning, but mostly common sense. If you are not good at planning ahead, then raw feeding is not for you.

At first you will have to shop around to find cheap sources of meat. This is time-consuming, but shopping is easier later on once your best sources are identified. Ethnic and mom-and-pop grocery stores are a good place to start. I shop at different stores for specific meats that each store sells at a good price. Chicken can almost always be found on sale, even at expensive stores. But, vary your proteins and do not always feed the same thing. Once your dog is used to a variety of proteins, feed your cheapest source most of the time, but add in different proteins every third or fourth meal for variety. A freezer just for the dogs is helpful for stockpiling meat you find on sale. For example, this past Thanksgiving I bought five-frozen turkeys at .39 cents per pound. Meat can be just as seasonable to purchase as produce.

I have a lot of fun shopping for unusual meat as people stop me in the aisles, or in the checkout line, and ask for recipes or share their recipes with me. Sometimes they just question me about whether or not something they see in my cart tastes good. Most of the time, I do not tell them what the meat is really for. Who knows, maybe it would taste good in a gourmet recipe, but no thanks!

## Produce

Most of the vegetables and fruits I feed are scraps that I would have previously discarded. I keep a bag in my freezer, and add the chopped tops of tomatoes; parts of celery; apples that have gone soft; leftover dinner vegetables (rinse the seasoning from them) and, just about every type of produce I have leftover. I also use the peels of everything except melons, citrus fruit, and bananas, and I include all of the seeds. I do not use the following: grapes, raisins, onions, mushrooms, and corn. These are either hard to digest or poisonous to dogs. I also do not use iceberg lettuce, which has very little nutritional content. I am careful not to add too many gaseous, spicy or watery items to the mix, and I wash all my produce before processing. You can get day-old produce for free if you are not too proud to ask your grocer. I find it easier to tell them that it is for my pig than to explain it is for a dog! My friends all humor me as well, and when they visit, they come with produce scraps.

## Veggie Glop

I puree my vegetables and fruit leftovers into veggie glop. This mixture has several other nutritious ingredients added in, and the base recipe comes from Ms. MacDonald's book noted above. I usually make a lot of glop and freeze it, then thaw about a quart at a time in the refrigerator for a day or so. Vegetables and fruits are hard for a canine to digest but freezing breaks them down. One theory is that in the wild, dogs got their vegetables from the partially-digested contents of the stomach of their prey. This theory makes a lot of sense to me, so I freeze my glop at least once.

The veggie glop recipe that follows this article is offered as a guideline for beginners, and that is all. It can be easily modified to add your favorite, or available ingredients, or to obtain the proper consistency of glop, which is dependent upon the water content of your ingredients. However, my dogs do not care one bit if I feed runny glop. The funny thing

is, Jesse eats his veggie glop before he eats his meat. Usually the small dogs get ground or chunks of meat mixed together with the glop so I do not know their preference.

### Preparation

I begin by partially thawing my bags of frozen scraps in cold water, while I prepare my utensils. I usually add to my frozen mix fresh carrots, apples and collard greens. Carrots make a great thickener, and the collard greens make up for the fact that I don't have leafy green vegetables in my freezer mix (my human family does not like these). The apples are just nutritious, and the small ones are cheap to buy in large bags. Basically, the produce I buy fresh is based on what is on sale, and what is lacking in my freezer bag of leftovers. You can add in the amount of fresh vegetables that you need depending on how much produce you have frozen, and how much glop you plan to make.

I use a meat grinder to puree all my ingredients and it works well on the partially thawed and drained freezer mix, as well as the fresh produce. I puree the fresh produce first while waiting on the frozen mix to thaw. I do not like to chop anything, and the leafy green vegetables are the only challenge when using a meat grinder as they get clogged. I solved this problem by wrapping a leaf tightly around a carrot and then grinding it up together. I also use the meat grinder to puree the eggshells that I add to the mix, as they are a good source of calcium for my dogs.

### Adding in Bone

Canines need bone in their diets. So, as I stated earlier, I feed whole cuts of bone-in meat occasionally. I also grind whole chicken thighs and the bone in my grinder, usually on veggie glop preparation day when the grinder is in use. To do this, remove the skin with a boning knife, and cut each thigh in three length-wise strips with a cleaver or other sharp knife. Then, place the thigh pieces in one layer on a cookie sheet, cover with plastic wrap and freeze a couple of hours. I find that soft meats do not grind well, at least not in my cheap meat grinder. Freezing makes the thighs hard enough to process without clogging my grinder. Weight-bearing bones are too hard to grind, but chicken thighs work well. I sometimes grind bone-in whole fish, but this is really quite gross and I avoid it when possible. I typically feed the big dog whole fish, and pre-cut catfish nuggets to the little dogs. I find that adding bone is very time consuming and tricky even when using a meat grinder, so I just cut most of the meat I use for my small dogs in chunks. You will need to be adept with a knife, or buy butcher's gloves. Cheap pork roasts are good for cubing, and the large bone will keep a big dog busy for several hours.

After mixing all ingredients, I refreeze using quart-size yogurt containers, margarine bowls, or freezer bags. Leave room for expansion in the containers, as the contents will expand. You can line the top with wax paper to reduce freezer burn, but the dogs don't mind freezer burn.

Big dogs are easy to feed raw. Our Pyrenees gets all bone-in meat, and he crunches a chicken thigh up like a cookie. If I feed him a lot of cheap cuts of meat, I usually increase the amount I feed him each day to compensate for getting so much bone.

### Convenience Foods

Even the best of planners sometimes forget to have dinner ready. For these days, I keep canned salmon and mackerel on hand, which is not raw, but cheap to stockpile from a dollar store, and fairly nutritious. I drain and rinse the fish because it is packed in salt. When I run out of veggie glop, I either rinse or feed canned spinach, or green beans. I also like to use canned pumpkin, which does not need to be rinsed. These foods are also good to use while vacationing with your dog.

Other handy meals are pre-frozen bags filled with the right portion of ground meat and veggie glop, and frozen chubs of ground turkey. These will thaw very quickly in cold water. Turkey chub is packaged in plastic wrap similar to the way sausage is sold. I buy my frozen turkey chub for .99 cents a pound at a non-chain grocery store. Wal-Mart sells it for about \$1.19 a pound.

I frequently compete in agility trials, and my husband cares for the dogs that are left at home. I usually fill snack-size bags with one serving per bag on food preparation day, and freeze these for his convenience. These are also easy to use when boarding, or for the pet sitter. If you only raw feed one dog, it is simple to make up many snack-size bags of ground meat and veggie glop at once and then just thaw a few each day. At my house, we feed in pounds not ounces, so the bags are too time consuming to pre-make for every meal.

### Supplements

I am not very diligent about giving my dogs supplements. I do try and add Solid Gold Seameal when one of my females is pregnant or nursing, and I regularly add Salmon Oil to all of their meals, because I think it benefits my dog with skin problems. It is also advisable, until your dog is used to his new diet, to supplement with some sort of probiotic that aids in digestion. You can have a nutritional panel run on your dog, but none of the vets in my small town have the capacity to interpret a panel. When I first started feeding raw, I was very worried about whether or not the dogs were getting everything they need. But, they are healthy, with nice coats, and no illnesses in the past year, and I no longer worry about it. My dog, Bébé, whelped a litter of five-healthy pups in June after six months of eating a raw diet.

### Waste

Besides the health benefits, one of the biggest reasons I feed raw is because of the reduction in yard waste. A raw-fed dog has small and compact stools, with minimal odor, and the waste quickly degrades to a small-ashy pile. I have six dogs and have not cleaned

up after them since I began feeding raw, and my yard is clean. This is a fabulous bonus for multiple dog households.

### Mixed diets

Ideally, it would be nice to switch a raw-fed dog back and forth to kibble, but in practice it did not work for me. My big dog has to eat raw since he is allergic to kibble. But, I have switched my small dogs back to kibble several times, and it gave them diarrhea. The only way that it works successfully is to add more and more kibble to their raw over a five-day or so period of time, until they are only eating kibble. Do not be surprised if they are not happy with the kibble and refuse to eat it. I found that my dogs liked the taste the first couple days, and then boycotted the kibble all together. My small dogs, who typically “dance and sing” at dinnertime, simply sniffed their bowls of kibble and walked away. Obviously, a dog will eat when hungry, so if you are switching back to kibble for boarding, take note that your dog will not starve himself.

You need to reverse the add-in process when you come home to avoid stomach upsets the same way you did before. I learned from experience that it is just as easy to make frozen single-serving packets for the kennel, than it is to switch back and forth, with no added upset to the dogs. Call your kennel and see if they have a freezer and refrigerator, and if they are willing to feed your dog raw. Explain to them that the food will be in individual bags for each meal. They should not have any objections--most kennels are familiar with raw-fed dogs.

Several of the raw feeding groups on Yahoo say not to mix raw with kibble as the two digest differently and cause stomach upset. I personally do not share this view as all foods digest at different speeds. I think the bigger issue is digestion problems resulting from switching back and forth between two entirely different types of food.

### My Gift to My Dogs

The biggest obstacle for me in feeding raw was just getting started. I was very nervous and unsure of the whole process, and would never have done it if the very life of my dog were not at stake. But, once I got over my initial fear, I found that feeding raw is the most natural and healthy thing I have ever done for my dogs. Quite possibly being my greatest gift to them that I predict will lead to longer, healthier, and disease-free lives.

### Veggie Glop Base Recipe:

- One to two pounds of produce
- Two raw eggs, with shells
- About 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- A splash of apple cider vinegar (quarter cup or less)
- Tablespoon of black strap molasses
- One to two cloves garlic
- One-half cup organ meat

Optional:

Ginger root or powder

Teaspoon of vitamin C

Just about anything else you think is healthy for your dog (nuts, seeds, herbs, etc.)