

What is there to eat around here?

Wolf-dog hybrids are carnivores. That brings up a number of issues/arguments/discussions surrounding the best diet for these exotic canines. As each animal is different, each may have different dietary needs.

Dietary preferences–BARF vs. kibble

If left to the canines, they would probably choose raw meat over any other food offered. That does not mean that such a diet is best for them. Meat has the protein they need, but is lacking in a number of important vitamins and minerals. Feeding raw meaty bones is one step better than just meat because that adds the calcium and phosphorous they need.

Feeding of meaty bones and other food supplements is often referred to as BARF–Bones and Raw Foods. Although this way of feeding is supported by many owners, a number of individual veterinarians and the AVMA have published statements about the dangers of this type of diet.

Nutritional analysis of 5 types of "Raw Food Diets"
Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association
(JAVMA), Vol 218 No.5, March 1, 2001 p. 705.
Drs. Lisa M. Freeman and Kathryn E. Michel.

"Nonetheless, the results of the small number of diets analyzed here indicated that there are clearly nutritional and health risks associated with feeding raw food diets. All the diets tested had nutritional deficiencies or excesses that could cause serious health problems when used in a long-term feeding program. Of equal concern is the health risks associated with bacteria in the raw food diets, especially the homemade diet that yielded E. coli O157:H7. Although owners feeding raw food diets often claim that dogs are more resistant to pathogenic bacteria, we are not aware of evidence to support that claim."

Just as many articles have been written about the terrible things that are put into canine kibbled diets. That's why when choosing a kibbled diet for the wolf-dog hybrid, it must be of very high quality, and that normally means expensive.

Kibble must have minimum quantities of crude protein and fat to meet AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards. Many kibbles say they are "complete and balanced for all life stages of the dog". That statement comes from a bag of dog food that has 21% crude protein, 9% fat, and has three grains in the first four ingredients listed. This is not really optimal for any canine, much less a high maintenance wolf-dog hybrid.

High activity, high maintenance animals need much more than the minimum requirements of protein and fat. 26 to 30% protein and 16 to 20% fat should be adequate for a wolf-dog hybrid, IF the protein comes from a meat source. If the protein comes from grain sources it is only marginally digestible, and of little use in a canine diet. Learn to read ingredient labels. Meat products should be the first, and hopefully the second, ingredient listed.

There has been a rather long debate about the use of a preservative called ethoxyquin in dog food. That preservative is used to preserve the fat in the meat products used in most dog foods, and also in many human grade spices. It is in any dog food that has meat from a rendering plant included in the ingredient list. It need not be listed on the bag if the dog food manufacturer does not add additional ethoxyquin during manufacturing. Few manufacturers use human grade meat products with no ethoxyquin, and the shelf life of such products is extremely short. A number of studies done in the 1980's concluded that ethoxyquin was not harmful to canines.

Kibble has a highly researched vitamin-mineral pack added, to supplement the ingredients. The better quality the kibble, the better the vitamin-mineral pack included in the mix. Feeding canine vitamins with a homemade diet is at best a hit or miss operation.

So, what is best? Many have found that a high quality kibble, supplemented by raw and cooked meats has led to healthy, happy, long-lived animals. If feeding raw meat, it is probably best to feed it frozen, before the bacteria have time to take over. Raw meat can also be a source of intestinal parasites.

Food Allergies

Many of the substances that canines can be allergic to are found in commercial dog food. The most common allergens in pet food include soy, corn, wheat and preservatives. If you find that your wolf or wolf-dog hybrid develops intense itching and licking of the paws or belly, you might check their food for offending substances. Although canines can undergo allergy testing similar to the type that humans undergo, it is not as accurate in canines as it is with humans. It is very costly and requires that the animal have its back shaved. Another way to determine if your animal is allergic to a substance in their food is to work with your vet in doing an elimination diet. Although this type of testing takes time,

approximately six weeks for each substance eliminated and re-entered into the diet, it is the most accurate for the animals and the most cost effective.

If your animal is found to be allergic to substances in their diet, it is important to find a food that does not contain the offending ingredients. This can mean “designer” foods, prescription food and even food that you can only obtain through the mail. As you probably guessed, these are often expensive to purchase, but they may be the only things that your animal can safely eat. Allergies have led to some exotic combinations of ingredients such as fish and potato, or venison and sweet potato.

Often people think their animal is allergic to a food substance when the substance just doesn't agree with the animal. Just like some humans who exhibit gastro-intestinal symptoms after eating certain foods, animals may experience the same effects with similar symptoms. Many wolves and wolf-dog hybrids cannot tolerate soy and corn based foods but they are not allergic to those ingredients. True allergies can be a life-threatening emergency if the animal is exposed to enough of the allergen or has a severe reaction.