



Dogs Naturally

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Nutritive Herbs

Herbs are an excellent source of whole food nutrition that can round out any diet for balanced nutrition

When I think of pet nutrition, I of course go immediately to the whole food diet and the necessary balance of the diet. But my next thought is the importance of the absorption of the nutrients within the diet, which is where nutritive herbs play an important part of good and balanced nutrition. Nutritive herbs are classified by the specific nutritional value they provide. They can enhance your dog's diet in a variety of ways.

Benefits of Nutritive Herbs

- ♥ They can provide medicinal effects like fiber, mucilage, diuretic, adaptogenic, and can play a key role in the absorption of vital nutrients
- ♥ They can be considered as both food and medicine as they have the elements of both
- ♥ They can contain carbohydrates, fats and proteins along with the vitamins and minerals necessary for good nutrition
- ♥ They can boost the immune system
- ♥ They can cleanse and alkalize (detoxify) the body
- ♥ They are nourishing to our pets on the deepest level: brain, bones, muscles, skin, coat, heart, lungs, liver and kidneys
- ♥ Although they're not a substitute for animal protein, they offer wonderful supplementation

It's becoming increasingly clear that to achieve the best health ever in our pets, they need to consume a balanced diet rich in good quality animal protein with absorbable vitamins, minerals and trace minerals. These can be supplemented with nutritive herbs, which offer a concentrated, synergistic and nutrient-rich balance.

Nutritive herbs can be given in either a dried or extracted preparation. They're readily available, affordable and palatable, which makes it easy to add them to meals.

Here are a few popular and easy to find nutritive herbs that you might consider offering to your dog.

Burdock Root (*Arctium lappa*) Compositae family

This is a common weed that grows in almost any uncultivated space. Medicine from the root is viable only from first year plants.

Burdock is most valuable for skin conditions and should be used over a long period of time to remove any systemic imbalance, which is often the cause. Part of the action of this herb is through the bitter stimulation of digestive juices and bile secretion, which aids digestion and appetite, and absorbs toxins from the bowel.

As a food, burdock root is delicious and cooks up a lot like a potato in a stew, but with a mild, sweet, mucilaginous flavor. Pets love the taste and it can be given in a powdered state or even cooked fresh. Burdock root is high in carbohydrates and inulin, and very high in iron, magnesium, silicon, thiamine, sodium, potassium, phosphorus and chromium.

Burdock is also a cleansing herb with a balanced mineral content.

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) Papilionaceae family

Commonly used worldwide as an animal feed, alfalfa (also known as the king of herbs), has been cultivated for thousands of years. Alfalfa is renowned as a cure for all inflammations including arthritis, it's thought to be hypocholesterolemic (lowers cholesterol) and hypoglycemic. Alfalfa is also a blood purifier and bitter tonic, and contains the digestive enzyme betaine, which makes it a digestive aid as well.

Alfalfa also contains a good supply of natural chlorophyll, the green color found in plants. Chlorophyll oxidizes quickly when cut, so it's best to use alfalfa in an extract or to dry it quickly to maintain the nutritive properties.

Alfalfa has 21% crude fiber, is 20% protein and is very high in Vitamin A, Vitamin C, copper and niacin amongst many other minerals, making it a rich source of nutrients.

Ginseng *Araliaceae* family

I didn't include the botanical or species name here as there are over 700 plants that are from this family. Grown throughout

Southeast Asia and tropical North America, we typically see upwards of 11 plants in North America, including Panax and American. This is what this information is based on.

As pets age, their ability to absorb nutrients can decline, creating under-nourishment. This results in loss of energy and alertness, and an increased risk of illness. Not only is ginseng known as an appetite stimulant, but studies also show it can increase the ability of the intestine to absorb nutrients.

Ginseng contains strong antioxidant components that help the body recover from stress, fatigue and illness. It also contains anti-inflammatory saponins that can also help regulate cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Another component in ginseng root is geranium, which has a powerful hydrogenating effect on the body, especially the liver.

Turmeric Root (*Curcuma longa*) Zingiberaceae family

Turmeric is the major spice found in most curry powders and is easily identified by its stark yellow/orange color. It's known for its anti-inflammatory properties and is anti-arthritic. Turmeric can also be used to treat bruises, inflammatory bowel disease, ulcers and is antiseptic.

The nutritive uses are many, including cleansing the colon of parasites, helping rid the body of yeast infections, reducing inflammation in the digestive tract, helping to eliminate flatulence and increasing the production of enzymes in the liver that metabolize toxins.

Turmeric is high in calories, fat, magnesium, manganese, niacin, potassium, selenium, silicon and sodium and contains many other minerals and vitamins.

Turmeric can be used as a fresh grated root, which can be added directly to food or cooked in broths. It can also be used in powdered or extract form. Turmeric should be used in small amounts to prevent digestive upset.

Nettle Leaf (*Urtica dioica*) Urticaceae family

Known as "stinging nettle" by its common name, once dried or extracted there is no sting left to the nettle leaf and it has a diminished chance of allergic reaction. In fact, fresh extractions are used to combat seasonal allergies by treating imbalances of the mucous membranes.

Nettle is a blood purifier, it can be a diuretic where there is excess fluid, it increases kidney and liver function and aids digestion.

Nettle is high in calcium, chromium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, silicon, thiamine and Vitamin A.

Nettle is also a catalyst for the absorption of many vitamins, minerals and trace minerals as well as several other herbs.

This certainly isn't an exhaustive list, but these herbs are most effective with pets and easily obtainable. Most can be found organically grown, ethically wild harvested, or even in your own yard. Feel free to experiment with one herb or make a compound blend of several, based on your dog's individual needs. 🐾



Joyce Belcher is an herbalist/formulator of pet supplements and herbal medicinals for veterinarians and is the founder of Herbs for Life, Inc. She lives in York, Maine with her husband, two dogs and two cats; they are all rescues. Visit Joyce at petwellnessblends.com

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