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The Whole Dog Journal™



A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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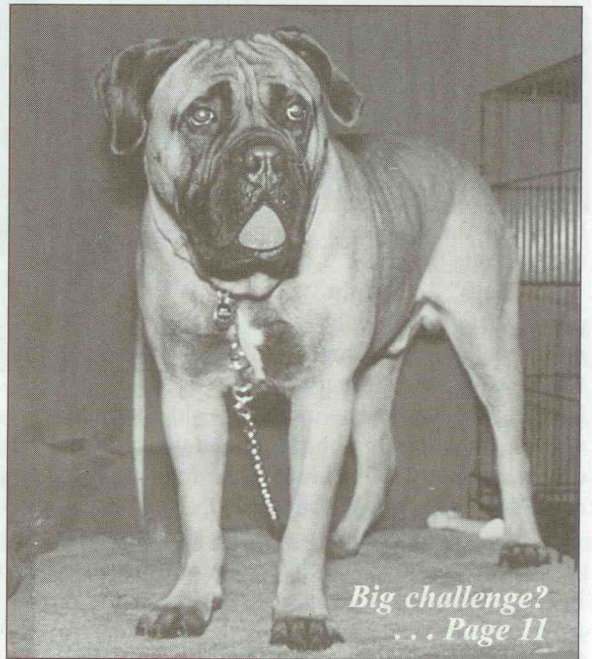
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A Real Treat

What to look for, and what to avoid, when buying treats for your dog.

BY NANCY KERNS

Allow me to sum up this article in one sentence: When buying treats for your dog, read the ingredients panel first.

I know that sounds *sooo* basic. Longtime WDJ readers are already experienced readers of food labels; they know from reading our February dry dog food reviews and our October canned food reviews and our occasional frozen food reviews that they have to understand what is in the food their dog may potentially eat before they buy it.

But dog treats make fools of us all. Nowhere in all of the gigantic field of pet supply marketing are the packages so cute and the names of the products so amusing as in the dog treat category. Many of the biggest companies use every color in the rainbow to illustrate happy dogs on the packaging – in addition to their use of artificial food colors to make the treats resemble people food such



Treats are far from frivolous; they are an amazingly powerful training tool. Used appropriately, they promote the dog's enjoyment, confidence, and initiative.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Don't buy commercially made dog treats at the grocery store!**
- **Read the ingredients panel of any treat you consider buying. Pass it by if it contains artificial preservatives and/or colors.**
- **Also check the ingredients list for foods your dog may be allergic to or intolerant of.**
- **Look for treats that contain whole grains and/or fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables.**
- **Buy organic products whenever possible.**

as crispy bacon, tiny hamburgers, and adorable marrow-filled cross sections of bone.

The small, boutique-made treats lavish money and effort at marketing, too. Many of the smallest companies lovingly hand-make precious packages out of recycled paper, use winning photos of their own endearing dogs in their product literature, and sometimes even cut out their heart- or star-shaped cookies by hand.

All of these efforts are to get you to buy something you really don't need; that's why they go so far over the top. Treats are the one product that we feed our dogs that we may buy for all the wrong reasons.

A top-quality, species-appropriate diet is without a doubt *the* most important factor in a successful holistic healthcare program. It doesn't make any sense at all to invest in a chemical-free, nutritious food for your dog, and then slip him a bunch of unhealthy additives and fillers for dessert. So, even

though treats represent only a small portion of your dog's daily diet, they should at best support his health, and at worst, not undermine it. As ever, we are here to remind you to *read the label*.

What's on the label

We'll briefly review for those of you who are new to WDJ. We read labels for several reasons. The first is to make sure the products don't contain stuff that's not good for dogs – such as artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives. Those of us who are aware of our dogs' food allergies or intolerances are also on the lookout for ingredients that may make our dogs break out, itch, or suffer painful gas or diarrhea.

We also check the list of ingredients for foods that *are* good for dogs – things like whole meats, grains, fruits, and vegetables. The more organic ingredients we see, the better.