



Passover Foods for your Pets



On Pesach a Jewish person may not eat, own, or derive benefit from chometz which is fit for human or canine consumption. Owning chometz pet food to feed to an animal (even if the animal belongs to someone else or is ownerless) is a violation of the latter two of those restrictions. Although there are certain leniencies for foods that are not fit for human consumption, most modern day pet food would not be in that category. The food may be raw, or prepared in a way that most people would not entertain eating it. However, that does not put it in the halachic category of nifsal m'achilas adam – not fit for human consumption. While Ashkenazic Jews have a custom to not eat kitnios, they may own and derive benefit from them. If no certified (or recommended) pet food is available, the consumer would have to carefully read the ingredient panel to determine whether a specific product contains any chometz (and many, in fact, do).

A complete list of possible pet food ingredients is beyond the scope of this guide. However the following are a few pointers when reading the ingredient panel. If an ingredient does not appear in the following guidelines, it may still be chometz or chometz-sensitive.

1. In addition to checking for the five chometz grains – wheat, barley, rye, oats, and spelt – also look for brewer's yeast (a common flavoring agent, which is chometz), malt (a barley-based sweetener), pasta, xanthan gum (a thickener which may be fermented from chometz), and other generic terms which may refer to a chometz ingredient (e.g. flour, gluten, middlings, starch, et al).

2. Many varieties of animal feed contain a multitude of vitamins, minerals, and amino acids, some of which may well be chometz, and there is no realistic way for a consumer to determine which of them are problematic. However, the good news is that vitamins comprise such a small percentage of the animal food that they are batel. Therefore, it is generally accepted that if the animal food was created before Passover, it may be used on Passover.

3. Some common ingredients used in pet food which do not pose a Pesach concern are:

- a. Animal, poultry and fish products.
- b. Vegetables, such as alfalfa, asparagus, beets, and carrots.
- c. Assorted kitniyos foods, such as buckwheat, corn products, lentils, millet, peas, rice, peanuts, sunflower seeds, and soy products.
- d. Other items, such as barley grass, BHA, BHT, carrageenan, cellulose, colors, eggs, gums (other than xanthan gum), kelp, lactose, linseed, milk products, molasses, oils, psyllium, and whey.

By no means do these pointers cover all of the ingredients used in pet food, and we suggest that you contact a kashrus professional if you are unsure about any of the other ingredients in a given pet food.

A product listing both meat and dairy ingredients may not be used any time during the year. Feed available at zoos is often chometz and should not be purchased or fed to the animals on Passover. After Passover, pet food with chometz may be purchased only from stores which are non-Jewish owned (e.g. Petsmart, Petco) or Jewish owned and have sold their chometz.

NOTE: It is advisable to mix regular and Passover food together one to two weeks before Passover before switching completely to Passover food. The ratio of regular and Passover food should be changed slowly to get the animal used to the new diet. Check with your veterinarian before changing diet.

One may feed his pet any of the following items:

CATS: Beef Consumers are urged to check all labels for chometz and/or chometz-sensitive ingredients as listed in the introductory paragraph above.

DOGS: Consumers are urged to check all labels for chometz and/or chometz sensitive ingredients as listed in the introductory paragraph above.

FISH: Fish food, including pyramid feeders, and vacation blocks often have chometz. Goldfish and tropical fish can be given tubular worms, frozen brine shrimp, and freeze-dried worms (if they do not contain fillers).

BIRDS:

Finches, parakeets and cockatiels: Millet and canary grass seed as main diet

Canaries: Canary grass seed and rape seed

Parrots: Safflower seeds and sunflower seeds

Birds enjoy variety. You can provide this for larger birds, such as parrots, with pure alfalfa pellets (make sure it is pure alfalfa, since it is common to add grains). Smaller birds can also eat pure alfalfa pellets. For them, crush before feeding.

One can supplement the diet with sliced grapes, berries, or canned baby fruits. All large food should be shredded before serving. These items should be given sparingly. For minerals, one may use oyster shells (calcium) or a mineral block, such as Kaytee Tropical Fruit Mineral Block Treat.

SMALL MAMMALS:

Gerbils: Millet, sunflower seeds, safflower seeds

Hamsters: Sunflower seeds, potatoes, small amount of greens and vegetables; can supplement with grapes, apples, melon and oranges. If not accustomed to these items, give sparingly.

Guinea Pigs, Rabbits, and Chinchillas: Timothy hay, greens, and vegetables; can supplement with grapes, apples, melon and oranges. If not accustomed to these items, give sparingly. Guinea pigs will especially benefit from kale, parsley, and oranges, in sparing amounts. The orange will supply needed vitamin C to their Pesach diet.

Mice and rats: Sunflower seeds, greens, vegetables, and potatoes

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS:

Iguanas, Tortoises, and Turtles: Greens and vegetables; turtles can also have small amounts of raw chicken or cut-up earthworms

Anoles, Bearded Dragons, Small Lizards, Dart Frogs, and Tree Frogs: Crickets

Snakes: If possible, schedule this as a non-feeding week

Dwarf Aquatic Frogs: Tubifex worms or blackworms

Newts: Tubifex worms, bloodworms, or blackworms

Be aware that mealworms, which as living creatures are not chametz, are commonly sold in a bed of wheat flakes or oatmeal, which is chametz and, therefore, may not be owned or used on Pesach.

Live crickets should be gut-fed on bits of potato and vegetable 24 hours before feeding to lizards, to enhance their nutrition for the lizard. Whole insects (live or dead) with no additives or other ingredients are permissible. 🐭

