

Getting the Grain Out

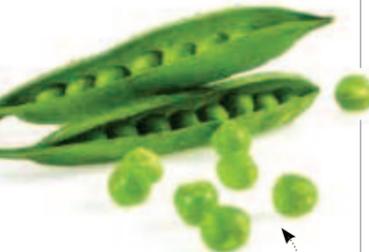
Popular brands stir in alternative ingredients as they offer up foods that break with tradition.

BY KATE PARHAM

IN OUR NEVER-ENDING QUEST to improve our diets and stay healthy, we haven't forgotten our pets. With \$20.6 billion spent on pet food in the U.S. in 2012, according to the American Pet Products Association, we're serious about spending time and money on animal nutrition.

"People today treat their pets like any other member of their family," says Thomas M. Edling, vice president of veterinary medicine for Petco. "Just as people seek out new diets or health food trends for themselves, pet parents seek the very best diets and health trends for their pets."

From homemade to organic, each pet food trend has its followers. And today, some of the best-sellers include cat and dog foods that carry a grain-free label.



"Eat your peas" takes on a whole new meaning when you're talking to your dog. If you're serving up grain-free food, some form of peas, as well as potatoes, sweet potatoes and garbanzo beans, may very well be on the list of ingredients along with protein sources.

WHAT IS GRAIN-FREE?

Grain-free foods use non-grain vegetable matter like potatoes, peas and carrots as the main carbohydrate source instead of corn, soy or wheat, says Simon Starkey, education veterinarian at PetSmart.

Grain-free diets adhere to the same guidelines and standards as traditional diets. They were developed for animals with grain allergies and used to be available only as prescription diets, Edling says. But today, pet food manufacturers have developed grain-free formulas for retail sale to meet demand.

"At Petco, we are seeing a significant increase in the number of pet parents interested in choosing grain-

free formulas" Edling says. "These have become some of our best-selling formulas."

Though not necessarily of higher quality, grain-free products are popular with owners looking for natural foods because they can tend to have simpler ingredient labels. And animal protein sources may appear higher up on the ingredient list.

Many traditional formulas are made with grain and more readily available ingredients such as corn, beef and chicken.

"[However], domestic cats' and dogs' wild relatives' dietary history consisted mainly of prey items (birds, rodents, rabbits, deer), fruits and vegetables, not grains," explains Starkey. So grain-free formulas, which can rely more on non-traditional meat products such as venison, lamb or duck, more closely mirror a wild diet.

Pets are less likely to have been previously exposed to these meats and therefore have fewer allergic reactions to them, Starkey explains.

COURTESY OF PETCO; THINKSTOCK

SINCE **Nutro** 1926

NATURAL CHOICE

★

PROVEN. NATURAL. NUTRITION.™

To build lean muscle, chicken's our first ingredient.

Because when dogs eat right, good health can happen naturally.

And to guarantee a shiny coat, we add sunflower oil.

Complete satisfaction or your money back.
(Chicken, Whole Brown Rice & Oatmeal Formulas)

2.00
off

any 30 lb. bag of
Nutro Natural Choice®
dog food.

petco

MANUFACTURER'S COUPON
EXPIRES 7/31/13

Present coupon and Pals Rewards card to receive this offer. Not valid on the purchase of gift cards, prior purchases, online or with any other coupon offer. Void if copied, transferred and where prohibited by law. Single-use coupon, limit one per household. Valid on in-stock items only. Selection varies by store. Shopper's coupon ("Mfr."). Sales tax not included. Expires: 7/21/13.

Consumer: One coupon per item purchased. Valid only on product(s) indicated. Not combinable with any other offers or discounts. Void if altered, transferred, sold, copied, or exchanged. You pay sales tax, if any. **Retailer:** The Nutro Company will reimburse you face value plus handling fee/allowance if submitted in compliance with our redemption policy (available upon request). Send coupons to: The Nutro Company Coupons, P.O. Box 880169, El Paso, TX 88588-0169. VOID WHERE PROHIBITED, TAXED, OR RESTRICTED BY LAW. CASH VALUE 1/100¢. ©/™ Trademarks © The Nutro Company 2013.

0079105-013225

wholepets

Good nutrition is the foundation for keeping your dog physically fit and healthy.

Nutro Natural Choice is a great solution to support complete pet care, which includes keeping your dog **physically fit, mentally alert, socially engaged** and **emotionally happy**.

petco

WHY GO GRAIN-FREE?

"The only pets that truly need grain-free foods are those that have food sensitivities or intolerances to a particular grain," Starkey says.

Some pets, such as those with dermatological and/or gastrointestinal issues like inflammatory bowel disease, internal parasites and pancreatitis, may have difficulty digesting specific grains—even if they don't have a grain-specific allergy, says Edling.

As you reduce your pet's exposure to the allergen, his or her skin, coat and gastrointestinal disorders should improve, though outcomes will vary based on the pet, says Starkey.

As long as the grain-free diet meets the nutrient profiles set forth by the Association of American Feed Control Officials, your pet should not experience any health-related drawbacks, he adds.

Christi Davidson of Dallas switched

her two dogs, Georgia, a rescued husky-Australian shepherd mix, and Wookie, a Pomeranian, to a grain-free diet in 2010.

"When we first got Georgia, she had really bad allergies and digestive issues," says Davidson. "We started playing around with food, and after many trips to the vet and different diets, the only thing that worked was grain-free. We noticed an immediate improvement: Georgia wasn't itching anymore, and her digestive issues were dramatically improved. No more throwing up or having trouble going to the bathroom."

Davidson also switched Wookie to a grain-free diet. "With both dogs, I now see a difference in the level of satisfaction they have after eating, too, because there's less fillers in grain-free, so what they're eating is more substantial and there's less of a stretch between meals," she says.

BEFORE YOU MAKE A SWITCH

>> If you suspect your pet has an allergy, talk with your vet. Determine if your pet is allergic and what the specific allergen might be, Thomas M. Edling of Petco advises.

Food sensitivities may take up to 12 weeks to respond to a dietary change, although six to eight weeks is more likely, says Simon Starkey of PetSmart. "Avoid treats and table food during the trial period as these may contain ingredients the pet is sensitive to," he says.

>> Consider the cost. Grain-free pet foods are typically more costly than traditional pet foods, but more affordable options are hitting the market, says Starkey.

"When I factor in the money spent in vet trips and medication, it's definitely cheaper in the long run," pet owner Christi Davidson says.

>> Follow label directions and don't worry about overfeeding. It's no more likely than on a traditional pet food diet, Starkey says.

COURTESY OF PETSMART



Because your pet's health is as important as your own.

GNC Pets® offers a full line of vitamins, supplements, treats, shampoos and pet care items designed to support your pet's overall health and happiness.



Why Choose GNC Pets® Products?

For more than 77 years, GNC has been the leader in the development and manufacture of human nutritional supplements. Now, GNC's commitment carries over to Pet Products! GNC Pets® products are produced at the same highest quality standards as our human supplements. All GNC Pets® supplements are manufactured in facilities across the United States.



Learn more at petsmart.com/GNC
PetSmart is the exclusive pet retailer for GNC Pets®



GNC Pets® products proudly display the National Animal Supplement Council (NASC) seal which guarantees our products meet guidelines for quality, safety and truth in labeling.