

Homecooked meals for furry friends

How to make cost-effective, fresh foods for improved dog health



By Brianna Dascher
Staff Writer

With pastry bag in hand and enormous chef's hat on head, Cheryl Bauer gets to work on a batch of salmon puffs for her two babies, Mabel and Dixie.

Mabel and Dixie are Bauer's dogs, and for her, giving her four-legged companions a little dietary variety is a labor of love.

From humble beginnings just mixing in the occasional roasted vegetable or piece of cooked chicken from the supermarket into her pup's dog bowls, Bauer progressed into a full-on canine chef. She

found herself creating elaborate recipes, and eventually, even leading cooking classes for dog owners. The natural next step: she recently published a compilation of her recipes, "Cookin' for Your Canine: Healthy Recipes for Happy Dogs."

The idea for her book began when Bauer tried to switch her dog from free-range chicken back to the supermarket stuff she used to feed him. With a laugh, Bauer describes her dog's look of total disdain. His refusal to even go near it raised a question for Bauer: What are we feeding our dogs?

Along with the desire to combine her passions for dogs and cooking, that question rolled around in Bauer's mind for almost two years before she started research for the book.

"I woke up one day with an image of the cover in my head, and I knew: I'm going to make a dog cookbook," said Bauer.

Over her years of creating canine-perfected dishes, she started seeing a big difference in the health and overall heartiness of her pets that she felt was important to share.

"While our dogs are young and healthy, we don't really

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Cheryl Bauer spends time with her dogs Mabel and Dixie. Bauer, of Boulder, wrote a dog food cookbook, "Cookin' For Your Canine."

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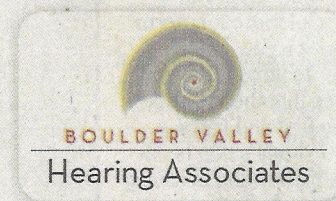
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think about the kind of illnesses they so often get, until they're sick," she said. "That's why I want to try and keep them healthy from the start."

This was affirmed after a friend's dog got diagnosed with cancer, and was constantly getting sick after meals. In the wake of pet food recalls, Bauer wanted to know that for at least some of the time, she knew exactly what her pups were consuming. Bauer started feeding her friend's dog homecooked food and saw the dog's stomach issues lessen significantly.

"I wondered, how can we keep our dogs healthier, and it seemed so obvious," she said.

"Nutrition is what you put in your body. That's one of the first things we change if we're ill. Dogs are the same," Bauer added. "So I started researching nutrition and thinking about what I could add into their food that will support their systems in a better way."

Her recipes range from handcrafted treats to a meatloaf specifically formulated for dogs. Some of the simpler recipes are particularly cost friendly. Bauer stressed that her home-made meals can last up to a week, even for a couple of dogs. Although Bauer has become a connoisseur for homecooked meals for dogs, she does still feed her pups regular old store-bought dog food too. This helps ensure a well-rounded diet for man's best friend.

Bauer offered general advice on what foods homecooks might feed their dogs.

Sardine Puffs

- 1 egg
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup applesauce
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons gelatinous chia seeds (soak one part chia seeds to four parts water for at least one hour in refrigerator)
- 2 cups whole wheat flour (if using gluten-free flour, increase by 1/2 cup)
- 1 4-4.5 ounce can of boneless sardines packed in water, preferably sustainably caught

Directions: Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Add all of the ingredients to a standing mixer, including the water from the can of sardines. Mix on medium for two minutes. While mixer is running, line the baking sheets with parchment paper or a Silpat. The mixture needs to be thick enough to hold its shape; add more flour if too runny.

Depending on the size of your dog, use a teaspoon or tablespoon to scoop the mixture onto the baking sheet. If you're feeling fancy, you could use a pastry bag. The mixture doesn't

spread, so place spoonfuls of mixture within a ½ inch-1 inch of each other, filling approximately two baking sheets.

Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes, switching the pans between bottom and top racks after the first 15 minutes of baking. Cool before you share with your pup. Store in refrigerator.

Source: Cheryl Bauer.



Cliff Grassmick / Staff Photographer

Cheryl Bauer makes dog treats in her kitchen.

Crazy Stew

- 2-2 1/2 pounds chicken or turkey thighs and drumsticks
- 1 cup frozen or fresh cranberries
- 1 large sweet potato or russet potato, diced
- 1 1/2 cup fresh string beans
- 1 cup chicken broth, no salt

Directions: Brown the chicken or turkey parts; then, add to a crockpot with the rest of the ingredients on low for four hours. Remove bones and skin from chicken and serve.

Source: Cheryl Bauer.

"Keep it simple," she said. "Even if you don't like to cook for yourself, there are little ways to add some healthy food to your dog's diet — you can open a can of sustainably-caught, good quality sardines, roast some vegetables, and add some gelatinous chia seeds to their foods. There are things like this that are easy, but that will improve your dog's health."

She also has a list of items never to feed your dog: avocado, chocolate, garlic, grapes, macadamia nuts, moldy foods, onions, raisins, raw bread dough, tomatoes, xylitol (found in sugar-free gum).

Your vet has the last say

Jonathan Stockman, a veterinary nutritionist at Colorado State University, said that a home-cooked diet is a particularly good option for pets with specific allergies or health issues, but that it's important to be in contact with a vet before testing new recipes, and to be cognizant of which foods are unsafe for canines.

"A home-cooked diet is a viable option for owners that prefer to cook for their pets or for pets with specific nutritional needs such as pet with specific dietary sensitivities. It is important, however, to make sure the pet is fed a complete and balanced diet," said Stockman.

He stressed the importance of continuous conversation with your dog's vet and being attentive of changes in your dog's behavior. A lack of well-rounded nutrition can cause a lot more longterm issues for a pet.

Like Stockman, Bauer believes that the vet always has the first and last say.

"Everybody's dog is different. If your dog is having issues, go check in with an expert. Always do your own due diligence," she said.

But in the meantime, try your hand one of Bauer's tried and tested recipes for salmon puffs or crazy stew, and let your own dog be the judge.