



9 Little-Known Rules That Can Help You Find a Superior Dog Food Brand

by Dog Food Advisor

These days, there are lots of dog foods on the market, so finding a good one can be overwhelming.

After all, on the Dog Food Advisor website (<http://www.dogfoodadvisor.com/>) alone, there are now:

- over 950 dog food reviews
- hundreds of product lines
- more than 4,100 recipes

So, how can you find a good brand? Here are nine (9) rules to help you find a superior food for your dog.

Rule #1: Read the Label

Pet food labels are loaded with lots of valuable information. Yet they can also be difficult to read. So, save yourself a lot of time and effort and favor dog food brands that include multiple product lines with higher ratings. That's because lower-rated recipes are more likely to contain:

- less meat
- more by-products
- controversial preservatives
- anonymous meat ingredients

Rule #2: Consider the Company

Many dog owners tend to distrust larger pet food companies. They mistakenly believe smaller brands are more likely to make better and safer products. However, the facts tell a different story.

Consider this: 93% of all pet foods sold in the U.S. are produced by just three (3) companies: Big Heart, Mars and Purina.¹

Yet 73 of the 88 recall events documented on this website during a recent 5-year period² are linked to products of smaller brands.³

In other words...even though smaller companies account for just 7% of the pet food and treats sold, they're responsible for an eye-popping 83% of the recalls.

In addition, after conducting hundreds of interviews, it's become apparent that a significant number of dog foods are not likely to meet the claims of nutritional adequacy printed on their labels. That's because many smaller companies have willingly admitted to us that they make no effort to verify the nutrient content or the safety of the foods they sell. And there's no law requiring any pet food company to do so, either.

The truth is, the smaller the brand, the less likely the company has the financial ability to perform all the steps ↗

(*"9 Little-Know Rules to Find a Superior Dog Food" cont.*)

needed to ensure the quality of its products.

Although there are always exceptions, it's important to keep in mind that larger companies are far more likely to:

- employ real food scientists, animal nutritionists and other veterinary professionals to design their products
- test raw materials for impurities and nutrient content
- conduct regular safety and quality control procedures
- own and operate their own manufacturing facilities
- verify finished goods before they are shipped
- maintain in-house testing laboratories

What should you do? Are dog foods made by larger companies better? No, larger companies may or may not be better. However...the smaller the dog food brand, the more critical it is for you to look beyond its label.

Rule #3: Identify the Manufacturer

Most dog owners assume their pet food company actually makes the products they sell. However, today, many companies use third-party co-packers to manufacture some, or all, of their foods. Yet others make their own. In any case, whether or not a company makes its own dog food is neither good or bad.

What's more important is to know the identity of the manufacturer of any brand you feed your pet.

Otherwise you'll never be able to track its recall history or judge the safety of its products.

Rule #4: Question Product Design

What may surprise you is that there's no legal requirement that a pet food be formulated by an animal nutritionist or any other veterinary professional. In fact, over the years, we've uncovered a shocking number of dog foods that have been designed by amateurs.

To ensure the nutritional health of your pet, you should contact each brand you're considering and determine who actually designs its products.

By the way, just knowing who formulates a product is not enough. You'll also want to know what qualifies that person to do so.

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Rule #5: Confirm Nutrient Testing

It's also important to know how the company can be certain each formulation is nutritionally complete and balanced. And, how often nutritional content testing is actually performed. Does the company conduct laboratory analysis, or do they run feeding trials?

Surprisingly, we have found many (mostly smaller) companies that never do any testing at all. That's why it's so important to find out what a company does to test each product to be sure it actually meets AAFCO nutritional guidelines.

Rule #6: Investigate Ingredient Sources

No dog food can ever be magically better than the ingredients that were used to make it. Yet labels reveal little about the quality of the raw materials actually used to make the food.

Some ingredients are purchased from commodity brokers on the open market (from the cheapest bidder). Others can come from countries known to have inferior food quality standards.

However, superior companies tend to source their ingredients only from established local or regional suppliers they do business with on a recurring basis.

What's more, federal law does not currently require any pet food company to disclose their country of origin or any other sourcing information on its label.

That's why it's so important to know the source of all ingredients that are used to make any dog food you buy. Avoid brands that will not share this information with you.

By the way, imported ingredients aren't necessarily bad. In fact, many can be of exceptional quality. For example: some vitamin and mineral supplements are pharmaceutical grade and can actually be superior to those sourced from the U.S. or Canada.

Rule #7: Demand Transparency

Some pet food companies work hard to conceal critical information about their products. For example: we've actually stumbled upon a number of companies that attempt to create an artificial sense of customer support by using voice mail to take messages. Yet no one ever returns the calls. Some brands don't even maintain a product website. And others resist being questioned by independent websites like The Dog Food Advisor. These companies make it difficult (or impossible) for us to get important answers while blaming their own unwillingness to cooperate on the fact we are not veterinarians.

Are there any questions suggested in this article that would require the expertise of a veterinarian to understand?

Obviously, hostile or defensive companies like these are the ones that most likely have something to hide and should not be trusted.

For all these reasons never buy any dog food made by any company that is not completely transparent about its products or its manufacturing practices. After all, as the caretaker of your dog, it's your right to know.

Rule #8: Verify Quality Control

At the time of purchase, all pet foods are at risk for containing:

- disease-causing pathogens (Salmonella, Listeria)
- mold toxins (aflatoxin, vomitoxin)
- environmental pollutants
- unsafe nutrient levels ➤

("9 Little-Know Rules to Find a Superior Dog Food" cont.)

Although many pathogens can be killed (pasteurized) during cooking, deadly toxins can remain in the food throughout the manufacturing process. What's worse, re-contamination can occur anytime living germs from uncooked food accidentally come in contact with a finished food product. That's why you must never buy a pet food from any company that ships finished goods before obtaining negative test results for any form of contamination.

Some companies are more diligent about this safety measure than others. A few test every batch while others test only randomly. And yet some never test anything at all.

In any case, even for us, it can be extremely difficult to determine just how carefully any brand administers its own quality control program.

Rule #9: Study the Recall History

Dog food recalls can provide some valuable clues about a brand's manufacturing habits.

Pet owners tend to misunderstand and overreact to dog food recalls. They're inclined to overvalue the real significance of these events whenever they occur. They forget that when it comes to any process involving human beings, errors are inevitable. Accidents are going to happen. That's what makes dog food recalls so unpredictable. In fact, trying to forecast any pet (or human) food recall has proved to be impossible.

Even though no pet food company can completely prevent a recall, it can control how it responds to such an event when it does occur. Unfortunately, while some companies work hard to prevent a recall, others work even harder at covering them up. For example: some misguided brands have been known to conduct silent recalls — informing only their distributors about an event, and not informing the public. Or they withhold the news about a recall and only release that information at the very end of the business week just so they won't have to deal with consumer questions.

Avoid buying dog food made by any brand that makes any attempt to hide recall events from the public when they occur. Remember, most recalls typically involve only a limited number of product runs and batches. Just because a particular recipe has been recalled doesn't mean the entire brand is defective. So, please don't make the same mistake made by so many other well-meaning pet owners. Don't overreact and exclude a quality food just because of a few isolated events.

In the end, your dog could be missing out on some of the very best canine diets out there.

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("9 Little-Know Rules to Find a Superior Dog Food" cont.)

The Bottom Line

Of course, no system can possibly guarantee your dog's food will never be recalled or that your pet will approve of your choice. However, any time you find a product that meets the majority of these guidelines, you can feel confident you're likely to have found a superior dog food brand.

Footnotes

1. Drew Harwell, "The McDonaldization of American Pet Food", The Washington Post, February 5, 2015
2. October 2009 through February 2015
3. All brands except Big Heart, Mars and Purina

New Dog Flu: Coming to a Town Near You?

by Radio Pet Lady, Tracie Hotchner



I don't like to be a fear monger, but the new strain of dog flu that killed and sickened many dogs in Chicago, has now spread to 12 states beyond Illinois. A few weeks ago, I wrote a blog about an episode of THE EXPERT VET radio show that my co-host Dr. Donna Spector and I did about the flu when it was confined to the Chicago area. If you missed it, here is that podcast again, because it's important that everyone understand the facts about this scary illness and make good decisions for their dogs without panicking.

However, the new news is that the flu has been identified in an increasing number of states, cases which have been reliably diagnosed with the help of a rapidly created test from IDEXX laboratories, where most of the research on diagnostic testing is done in this country. This test allows veterinarians to know immediately if a dog has the H3N2 flu, which has serious consequences, or some less worrisome upper respiratory illness.

There is no point in ignoring this disease as it spreads, especially if you have a vulnerable dog, meaning one who is very young, very old, or immune compromised because of a disease, like cancer, and is undergoing chemotherapy. This disease can be deadly but if caught early can be managed with supportive care, and, more importantly, can be avoided by taking certain precautions.

Dr. Jose Arce from the American Veterinary Medical Association caught up with me last week on my radio show DOG TALK® and was very helpful in explaining how to recognize and steer clear of this fast-spreading illness.

Right now, your best bet is to avoid dog parks or anywhere large numbers of dogs congregate. I'd suggest that rather than trying to tire your dog out by letting them run wild with other dogs, instead you can use more of their energy and even burn more calories by doing ten minutes a day of trick or obedience practice. Make sure you have some really tasty treats on hand (in your goody bag mix up bits of real cheese and Halo Liv-a-Little protein treats and pieces of biscuits to reward them). You'll be amazed by how much calmer and better companions they are when you focus their mind on a task rather than simply allowing them to run and wrestle with other dogs. Think of it as a benefit of the spreading dog flu!



Dog Tricks That Can Reduce Stress at the Vet

by Mikkel Becker

One popular dog trick, the shake, makes it easy for veterinary staff to handle your dog's paws for an examination or a nail trim.

The veterinary office can be a frightening destination for many dogs, but it doesn't have to be. One way to reduce your dog's stress is to ask your dog to do some simple tricks during his visit. This can help keep him calm and focused.

Choose tricks that your dog is confident and comfortable performing, and be sure to practice them ahead of time so that your dog is used to the commands and knows what is expected of him. Always provide lots of rewards and positive reinforcement!

It's important to note, though, that this approach may not work with all dogs as some canines may be too anxious to respond constructively. Strong emotional reactions, including fear or panic, can interfere with a dog's ability to respond to familiar commands. If your dog is too anxious to participate, or if he has trouble remaining calm, talk to your veterinarian about other options.

Teach These Simple Tricks

Go to your mat:

A mat can act as a type of security blanket for your dog as it provides a familiar, safe space for your pooch during his visit. A mat gives your dog a place to relax while you wait for the vet. Productive chews, food puzzles or dropped treats can help keep your dog on his mat. In the exam room, a mat can give your dog's paws grip and stability on potentially slippery surfaces, like the floor, scale and exam table. A dog who is trained to go to his mat may be more willing to move onto these spaces at the vet's office. Mats with a nonslip bottom are ideal.

Puppy pushups:

This combination of tricks (sit, down, stand) can be used to get your dog to rest, when needed. Puppy pushups can also help keep him stationary while he's on the scale or table. Ask the staff to interact with your dog by giving him one of the basic cues (sit, down, stand) followed by a treat (or two). This is an easy way to teach your dog to associate good things with the veterinary staff.

Shake:

Ask your dog to greet the vet or his staff with a shake. This helps your pooch establish a comfortable, familiar relationship with them. Shake is also an easy way to get your dog to willingly offer his paw for nail trims or for an examination of the paw and leg area, and it can help your dog feel more comfortable having his paws handled.



How To Keep Your Pets Safe During a Natural Disaster

by PetPav.com

We hate to think about something as scary as an earthquake or natural disaster that could hit us any day. While we hope one never occurs, it is always better to be prepared for you, your kids and your pets. After all, our pets can not defend or survive on their own. Some of the things you can do to prepare for something unexpected is to assemble an animal emergency supply kit and develop a pet care buddy system, just as in an emergency. Whether you decide to stay put or move to a safer location, you will need to make plans in advance for your pets.

Below are some tips and/or reminders to help:

If you evacuate your home, NEVER leave your pets behind! Our pets most likely cannot survive on their own and if by some remote chance they do, you may not be able to find them when you return.

If you are going to a public shelter, it is important to understand that animals may not be allowed inside. Plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your pets. Consider loved ones or friends outside of your immediate area who would be willing to host you and your pets in an emergency.

Make sure to prepare for us too!

Make a back-up emergency plan in case you can't care for your pets yourself. Develop a system with neighbors, friends and relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so.

Take pet food, bottled water, medications, veterinary records, cat litter/pan, manual can opener, food dishes, first aid kit and other supplies with you in case they're not available later. Before you find yourself in an emergency situation, consider packing a "pet survival" kit which could be easily accessed if a disaster hits.

Make sure identification tags are up-to-date and securely fastened to your pet's collar. If possible, attach the address and/or phone number of your evacuation site. If your pet gets lost, his tag is his ticket home.

Make sure you have a current photo of your pet for identification purposes.

Make sure you have a secure pet carrier, leash or harness for your pet so that if he panics, he can't escape.

Below are some items to think about keeping on hand in case of an emergency:

In addition to an emergency kit, below are some items to consider keeping in or near your pack include:

- A week's worth of canned or dry food (be sure to rotate every two months)
- Disposable litter trays
- Litter or paper toweling
- Liquid dish soap and disinfectant
- Disposable garbage bags for clean-up
- Pet feeding dishes
- Extra collar or harness as well as an extra leash
- Copies of medical records and a waterproof container with a two-week supply of any medicine your pet requires. ↗

("How To Keep Your Pets Safe..." cont.)

- Bottled water, at least 7 days' worth for each person and pet (store in a cool, dry place and replace every few months)
- A traveling bag, crate or sturdy carrier, ideally one for each pet
- Flashlight
- Blanket (for scooping up a fearful pet)
- Recent photos of your pets (in case you are separated and need to make "Lost" posters)
- For cats: Pillowcase, scoopable litter
- For dogs: Extra leash, toys and chew toys, a week's worth of cage liner.

You should also have an emergency kit for your human family members. Some of the items to include: batteries, duct tape, flashlight, radio, multi-tool, tarp, rope, permanent marker, spray paint, baby wipes, protective clothing and footwear, extra cash, rescue whistle, important phone numbers, extra medication and copies of medical and insurance information.

If you live in an area that is prone to certain natural catastrophes, such as tornadoes, earthquakes or floods, you should plan accordingly.

Make sure to determine well in advance which rooms offer safe havens. These rooms should be clear of hazards such as windows, flying debris, etc.

Try to find easy-to-clean areas such as utility rooms, bathrooms, and basements as safe zones.

Have access to a supply of fresh water is particularly important. In areas that may lose electricity, fill up bathtubs and sinks ahead of time to ensure that you have access to water during a power outage or other crises.

In the event of flooding, go to the highest location in your home, or a room that has access to counters or high shelves where your animals can take shelter.

Let's hope that you or your pets never have to experience a natural disaster. But, as always, it is better to be prepared just in case it does occur and you will have the supplies needed and ready. ☐



Is your dog a fence-jumper? Try paw-proofing the top of your fences with a PVC "roller bar" which dog paw can't hold onto or grasp. For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/1IU270I>.

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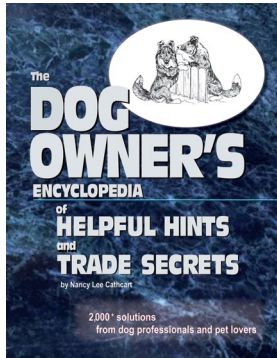
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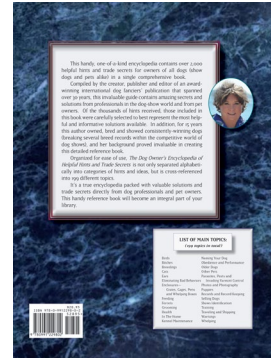
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