Feeding hedgehogs at home

Feeding hedgehogs prevents much more than starvation. A hedgehog who has access to nutritious food will be able to maintain a healthy immune system. This will make them more able to fight infection and helps keep the parasite/host balance in check.

WHAT SHOULD I FEED HEDGEHOGS?

The best thing to feed hedgehogs is dry complete cat or kitten food, easily available from most supermarkets. There is no need for additional treats, toppings or additives.

Cat food is recommended as it is regulated so you can have confidence that it is safe. Commercial hedgehog food is unregulated and can contain things that are bad for hedgehogs such as mealworms, peanuts and sunflower hearts.

In addition, hedgehogs have small mouths so cat biscuit can be a better size for them than dog biscuits which tend to be bigger.

Sainsbury’s and Tesco Complete Kitten Dry are particularly good. For baby hedgehogs, Royal Canin Mother and Babycat are also very good.

Some specialist hedgehog foods are poor quality, and contain ingredients that are harmful to hedgehogs such as mealworms, nuts and seeds. However, Spikes and Brambles are good quality and are safe to feed to hedgehogs.

Avoid ‘Hedgehog Food’ that contains a mixture of nuts, mealworms and seeds, as all these ingredients are very harmful to hedgehogs.

WHAT DISHES SHOULD I USE?

Use dishes that are shallow, heavy, have straight sides. Always provide clean water, especially in the dry summer months. Old saucers are a good budget option too.

WILL THEY GET BORED EATING THE SAME FOOD ALL THE TIME?

No. In fact, hedgehogs dislike change and once they start taking the supplementary food you offer you’ll have a job persuading them to change!
BUT I LIKE TO GIVE THEM A TREAT!

You already are, by providing nutritious food that they don’t have to forage for. Humans have developed a complex emotional and psychological attachment to food. Food is simply fuel to hedgehogs and they will be glad not to have to hunt for it.

I HAVE CHANGED THE TYPE OF FOOD AND THEY DON’T LIKE IT!

Hedgehogs are creatures of habit and they don’t like change. Hedgehogs are also highly adaptable creatures and will adapt to new food, particularly if are able to mix the old food with the new for a few days. You may have to clean up untouched food for a few days, but hunger will bring the hedgehog back!

BUT THEY LOVE MEALWORMS, PEANUTS AND SUNFLOWER HEARTS!

Yes, they do, the same way humans love sweets or crisps. Hedgehogs have a highly developed sense of taste, and they use this to explore their world. When they smell something intriguing they will lick it. Apart from looking like their natural prey, mealworms have a distinct smell and taste that hedgehogs seem to find delicious.

The body of any mammal needs to maintain the correct blood levels of calcium and phosphorous, to prevent disorders such as metabolic bone disease. Certain foods, such as mealworms, peanuts and sunflower seeds, are high in phosphorous and very low in calcium. If too much phosphorous is eaten, calcium is taken from the body’s calcium stores (the bones) to correct the ratio. This reduces the bone density, making them weak, thin, bendy and deformed. The hedgehog will be in constant pain, at a high risk of fractures, and eventually will be unable to walk to find food and will starve to death.

Please, never give hedgehogs mealworms and if you feed birds mealworms and sunflower hearts in your garden please do sweep up after them at the end of the day to prevent hedgehogs eating them.

FIND OUT MORE

Thanks to Hedgehog Cabin whose text formed the basis of this information sheet.
You can find out more about this Hampshire rescue and how you can support their work here: www.hedgehogcabin.info
Find out more about the University of Liverpool’s Hedgehog Friendly Campus Scheme by following us on Twitter @LivUniHedgehogs
Or by emailing Zoë Chapman, Hedgehog Champion, University of Liverpool, Z.Chapman@liverpool.ac.uk