

If Your Pet Likes to Munch on Grass, Here's a Safer, Nutrient-Filled Alternative

Eating the green stuff growing around your home or yard can help your pet's digestion. But it comes with a wide variety of potential health problems. Inexpensive and chock-full of vitamins, minerals, and proteins, this alternative could be just what the doctor ordered.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If your pet likes to nibble on grass occasionally, consider growing your own sunflower sprouts to offer him instead
- Sprouts are an easy-to-grow, inexpensive source of fresh, live organic vegetation for dogs and cats. Many types of sprouts contain significantly more digestible vitamins, minerals, proteins, and enzymes than the adult plants
- It's easy to grow your own sunflower sprouts even in a small space. You can either sprout them or grow them in potting soil
- You can free-feed sprouts to your pets if they are able to regulate their intake. Otherwise, you'll need to offer a measured amount each day depending on their body weight

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Most dogs and cats, given the opportunity, will eat grass occasionally or even on a regular basis because they know instinctively that it improves their digestive health. But unfortunately, grass isn't typically very nutritious, even pet grass, and outdoor grass is often loaded with fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, animal waste, potential parasites, and other contaminants.

If your pet likes or needs to eat grass now and then, my question is, have you considered growing your own sunflower sprouts to offer instead? **Sprouts** can provide a very easy and inexpensive source of fresh, live organic vegetation for your dog or cat to nibble on.



Dr. Becker's dog Ada



Dr. Becker's dog Violet

Sprouts Are a Rich Source of Nutrients for Pets

Seeds are the first life stage of a plant, and sprouts are the second stage of a plant's life. They are the tiny stems of the plants that emerge from wet seeds before they put down roots and become full-grown plants.

After a few days of germinating, these little plants are packed with a ton of nutrients. In fact, pound for pound, many sprouts contain significantly more digestible vitamins, minerals, proteins, and enzymes than the adult versions of the same plants.

Sprouts are rich in enzymes, making them almost pre-digested, similar to plant matter that wild dogs and cats ingest from the stomach contents and GI tracts of prey animals.

Unlike vegetables, which can be difficult for pets to digest if they're consumed whole, during sprouting much of the starch that's contained in the plant seed is broken down into simple sugars by amylase. The proteins are converted into amino acids and amides by protease, and the fats and oils are turned into simple fatty acids by lipase.

Benefits of Sprouts

Sprouts have many beneficial attributes. For example:

- They support cell regeneration
- They are powerful, natural, and whole food sources of antioxidants, minerals, vitamins, and enzymes that protect against free radical damage
- They have an alkalizing effect on the body that is thought to protect against disease, including cancer, since many types of tumors and cancers put the body into a state of acidity
- They are abundantly rich in oxygen, which can also help protect against abnormal cell growth, viruses, and bacteria that cannot survive in an oxygen-rich environment

In addition to their nutritional benefits, sunflower sprouts are also the ultimate in homegrown foods. When you grow them yourself using organic seeds, you can be sure you're not exposing your pet to harmful pesticides or other chemicals.

Sunflower sprouts are also among the least expensive foods you can buy or grow for your pet to "graze" on. Interestingly, if we don't provide living foods for our cats to eat, they often end up snacking on our houseplants. Since many kitties also tend to immediately throw up after nibbling a houseplant, and because some houseplants are toxic, sprouts are a really safe and healthy alternative.

If you grow them yourself, you can cut the cost by about 90% or more compared to buying them.

Sprouting Process

When sprouting your own seeds, it's best to ensure they haven't been chemically treated, so buy organic seeds. Soak them overnight in water in a Mason jar covered with a mesh sprouting screen. The soak time depends on the type of seed you're sprouting: 5 hours for small seeds and up to 12 hours for really large seeds and grains.

In the morning, drain the fluid off (I water my plants with it) and rinse the seeds. Turn the jar on its side and repeat the process three times a day until the seeds sprout.

On average, sprouting time is about three days. Rinsing and draining the seeds three times a day gives them just the right amount of moisture, and also helps flush away toxins.

Your container should be about a quarter to a third full of seeds, since they will swell to around eight times their original size over three days. I recommend keeping the jar at room temperature with good air circulation. At my house, I put it under the counter beneath my kitchen sink.

Once the green tips start to appear on the sprouts, you can begin feeding them to your pets right away, or you can refrigerate them, or plant them.

Another option is to grow your seeds in potting soil, which is how Dr. Mercola does it. I like the sprouting phase because it speeds the process up. When grown in soil, you can harvest your sprouts in about a week.

A pound of seeds will produce at least 10 pounds of sunflower sprouts, which is a great yield.

Of all the different kinds of sprouts, sunflower shoots produce the most volume. In one 10" x 10" tray, you can harvest between 1 and 2 pounds of sunflower sprouts. You can store them in the refrigerator for about a week after harvesting.

Feeding Sprouts to Your Pet

At my house, I simply put the tray down on the ground and let my pack nibble on them throughout the day. In the evening, I put them up on the counter and my kitties usually continue to snack on them overnight.



Ada



Violet

If you're sharing your harvest with your family, you can snip off sprouts, and then put them in your pet's food bowl or on top of their regular food. All of my pets regulate their sprouts intake really well, so I don't have to limit their access.

However, if you happen to have a dog that obsesses over sprouts, you're not going to put the tray on the ground because he might gorge himself. Instead, as a general guideline, you can offer about 1/8 to 1/4 cup of sprouts for every 20 pounds of body weight each day. So for example, your 80-pound dog can eat up to 1 cup of sprouts per day. For your 10-pound cat, 1/16 to 1/8 cup per day is plenty.
