

FEEDING GREAT DANES, ESPECIALLY PUPPIES

by Jill Swedlow

Danes are a giant breed. The amount of growing they have to do to reach adult size in comparison to say, a Golden Retriever, is enormous. In only a year, almost full skeletal size is reached. Compare that to the very slow growth of a human who essentially reaches the same size and weight at adulthood. With bones forming and reforming so quickly, it isn't surprising that much can go wrong in a short time.

Vets and breeders used to think that it was necessary for giant breeds to consume huge quantities of protein, calcium, phosphorous and vitamin D in order to reach their adult full potential. Several extensive research projects have proven that over-nutrition and, worse, over supplementation with calcium, can be the causative agents in the many growth problems in the giant breeds. Now, informed breeders strive to keep growth steady but slow! One recommendation that has been around quite awhile is to keep protein levels below 24%. Some even say it should be less. After all my years in Danes and experienced feeding just about every diet you can name, I'm convinced that as long as the puppy is getting all the nutrients it needs, protein levels are not that important. I have raised several puppies on raw diets where the protein level is very high. They have all grown slowly and had no growth issues. I think that keeping the dog lean is far more important than protein levels. That is just my own opinion. There are as many opinions on feeding Danes as there are breeders so use your common sense.

I wanted to write an article to help people learn how to read a dog food label in order to select the best quality food. As my research progressed, I became convinced that NO manufactured dog food is really the best way to feed dogs. Some of the ingredients in some of the lower quality foods are frightening. Animals with cancers, animals that have been euthanized (perhaps including pets) with lethal injection (and the chemicals are still in their bodies) animals that are unclean, ad nauseum, literally! But if you choose a high quality food and then supplement with scraps, meat, cottage cheese, eggs, veggies and fruits it's likely that the dog will get what it needs.

Because most dog foods are completely balanced for all stages of growth, you'll upset the delicate balances if you start adding calcium and other unnecessary items. If the kibble you use does not add vitamin C, this is one supplement you might want to use. 500 mg AM and PM is good. Although dogs can manufacture their own vitamin C, it can't hurt to give them a little extra. Because the kibble is balanced, don't go overboard with adding high calcium foods such as meats and cottage cheese. To 3 or 4 cups of dry food, add no more than 2/3 cups of cottage. This is a guideline. I don't measure anything other than the dry food.

Its helpful to learn a bit about how to read and interpret the labels on dog foods. Poultry meal and poultry by-products are most definitely not the same ingredient. Any ingredient which is designated as "by-products" is most likely stuff like beaks, feathers and feet, basically unusable protein sources for dogs. Poultry meal means that the whole chicken

has been utilized. Also protein levels can be misleading depending on the source of the protein. A dog food label can list 28% protein but if it's derived from leather dust, the dog will never be able to utilize it. The first ingredient listed on the label must be the highest percentage of the food. Therefore if you see poultry meal as the first ingredient, the chances are that it's a higher quality food. If grains make up the bulk of the first ingredients, beware. This is not to say that just because grain is the first listed ingredient, that the food is no good.

It is also helpful to educate yourself about preservatives. I always avoid foods that use any kind of chemical as a preservative, especially those containing ethoxyquin or BHT. I also avoid any food that uses tomato pomace. This is the left over parts of tomatoes after they've had anything good taken out of them for human use. Now, this in itself isn't particularly bad, but what is left over contains the highest concentration of insecticides of almost any by-product you can name, especially the tomato skin! No thank you!

By the time my pups are six weeks old, they're on whatever diet my adults are on at the time. Over the years I've used many different foods. Today I've come to believe that dogs don't do well on grain based diets. Because of that I currently feed grain free to all three of my present housemates.

I've always added scraps from the table or leftovers to give them some variety in the diet. Occasionally cottage cheese in small amounts (no more than 15% of the total kibble being fed) and sometimes yoghurt. I also occasionally add raw ground beef, or a raw egg (shell & all) or give them raw carrots or apples or any other vegetables or fruits they like. You'll be surprised how much they love this stuff! Recent studies on bloat at Purdue (1997) have indicated that dogs receiving table scraps and variety in their diets are less likely to bloat than dogs receiving the same food day in and day out. And hey, come on, canines are omnivores. In the wild they eat a huge variety of everything.

Even though you feed the best diet in the world, you must also control the dogs weight/body condition. Puppies should be on the lean side. You should just be able to feel the ribs. If he's roly poly and has rolls of skin, he's too fat. At seven weeks most pups are consuming around 1 1/2 to 2 cups of kibble 3 times a day. This will increase from week to week as the puppy grows. Most pups top out at around 4 cups, twice daily by the time they're 4-6 months. However, dogs (males) will often eat more than bitches. I had a bitch who at 6 months old was eating 5 1/2 cups AM & PM and she was almost too lean on that. She was very tall and VERY ACTIVE!!!!

Jill Swedlow, SunStrike Great Danes