



## Raising Backyard Meat Rabbits

### Transcript – Module 3

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Hi, I'm so glad you've joined me for module three. In module three, we're going to learn about all about feeding your rabbits and watering your rabbits. We're gonna talk about alfalfa pellets, what you want to see in a good feed for your rabbits and then we're going to go out to the garden and you're going to find out what can you grow for your rabbits and what can you forge around your property to make a salad for your rabbits every day. And then we are gonna set up an automatic watering system together and wait and find out the hardest thing about raising rabbits in the North. And then the hardest thing about raising rabbits in the South, how your climate affects feeding and watering your rabbits. Alright, let's dive back into the adventure of raising backyard rabbit.

Most people who raise rabbits start out with alfalfa pellets, feeding them that, and that's what I recommend. Get used to raising rabbits before you start venturing out to forage and growing them things. Pellets are made specifically for rabbits. They have everything a rabbit's gonna need. What you want to look for when you read the label of a pellet bag is like the minimum of 16% crude protein and then a minimum of 16% crude fiber. Now, then you're going to see a lot of other ingredients and some you're not even going to be able to pronounce, so that's the thing about rabbit pellets. You a lot of time you can't control the ingredients in them. And that brings up GMO. Are my pellets GMO? Well, much of the alfalfa crop and the soy crop, which makes up the crude fiber, are GMO these days and they also have pesticides and of course herbicides sprayed on them because they are GMO, they're Roundup ready. So, I found that it was way too expensive to get an alfalfa pellet ordered at my feed store that wasn't GMO. So that just made the meat too costly for me to raise rabbits for meat. I mean, there was no point in it if I fed them that expensive feed. And there are also specialty feeds that have, you know, probiotics and da da da and again, those expensive feeds, it just, it wouldn't be worth it, especially in the South. It a little bit harder to raise rabbits for meat in the South and make it pay off. So, I have to just use the regular alfalfa pellets and I get them from my feed store. The cheaper ... the bigger the bag, the less expensive the product is going to be. So, I get a 50-pound bag at my feed store and I store them in a metal trashcan cause you want to keep 'em away from moisture.

So obviously the more food you can grow yourself, the more you're gonna get away from ingredients that you can't pronounce and you're going to have more power over the ingredients that go into your rabbits and I think they're going to be healthier because of it. So, we're going to go out in the garden and I'm going to show you how to make a salad for your rabbits in just a minute. Now if you're working with pellets, how much to feed your rabbits? I'm basically, the rule of thumb is half an ounce to an ounce of pellets for each pound of rabbit.

So my rabbits, I feed a half a cup in the morning and then I come back again and feed a half a cup in the evening because rabbits are creatures that eat at daybreak, early in the morning and then they eat again right before the sun sets when it's just getting, almost before dark. And so, I try to just go with that pattern. Some people just do it once a day because they have work and whatnot, but I also like coming out in, you know, I feed them in the morning. I like coming out again in the evening just to check on everything. Is everything going okay? Did someone spill their water and you know, is there a problem? And I have found before, you know, just various little things. And so that's what I like to do to keep with their normal eating pattern. So that's about one cup every day that my adult rabbits get. Now, if I'm working with a pregnant doe, the last week of pregnancy, she gets all she wants and when she is nursing those babies, she needs a lot of food to sustain her. So again, she gets all she wants. I just keep that feeder filled and then grow-outs up to 12 weeks of age also, they get all they want, and I usually have them in rabbit tractors, so I'll share that with you in another module.

One thing I forgot to tell you about feeding is that when mom is in there with her babies, you want to do away with the dish and you want to get something like this that you can get up off the ground because the babies will poop in the dish. Mom, she doesn't so much, she doesn't the poop in the dish, but the babies will sit in it and poop in it so, you can't have that. And so just the feeder like this attached to the inside wire of the cage is perfect because the babies can't climb up in it and poop in it. And that way also you can give mom and babies all they want in this type of feeder. So, this, in this situation, you give the bowl up and do something like this. So that is all about alfalfa pellets. There's one other thing that you're going to need to feed your rabbit and that is hay and the hay is going to help to push the food through their system. So, it's very important that they always get a good source of hay. So, let me show you how I do that.

As I said, your rabbits are going to need a constant supply of fresh, clean hay to help push everything through their digestive system and I use Coastal Bermuda. You can also use Timothy. It's called Meadow hay or Orchard hay. You can use, just depending on what is in your area. I get mine from the feed store and they ... I pay a city price for it. So, if you're, if you can get it out in the country, that's better, but the problem is having a place to store it where it'll be nice and dry. So, I use a big storage container in my garage to store mine with no lid. So, it just keeps dry cause it's a little bit humid here. I fill their hay racks every couple of days. So, it's good not to put the hay down on the ground or at the bottom of their cage cause you'll lose most of it. It'll go through the bottom of the cage and then also sometimes it gets soiled and then they eat it and that can lead to health problems. So, I use hay racks when I feed my rabbits. Let me show you how to make a free hay rack for your cages.

What you're going to need is a plant tray from a nursery, from one plant nursery and two zip ties and scissors. And I have a model here of one I made. I've gone about two spaces up. I'm just gonna slip it in there as my model. Just cut the hay rack to fit what I want. Alright, Imma slip my model off and you can see it's almost there. Alright, voila. There's our hay rack. Alright, let's put it in. I'm just going to use two zip ties to fasten this to the side of the cage. Alright, it's as easy as that. I'm just going to fill it with hay, and he can just munch to his heart's content. Sometimes your rabbits will chew them, but they're pretty ... they're free to make so, I just make a new one every once in a while, if they chew them up. Everyone starts out with pellets, but it doesn't take long to realize that you can really save money growing your own food for your rabbits. So, let me show you how to make a salad from your garden for your rabbits. You can come in the cool of the morning or the cool of the evening and make a salad. So just some of the things I have here is grapevine and leaves. I've got kale in my salad, purslane, I've got beet greens, and some chopped up chives. I've got a little bit of mint. Let me add some swiss chard, not too much of this cause things from the broccoli family can be a little bit gassy for the rabbits, but here's a good one. And then my favorite, one of my favorites, comfrey and I'm gonna slip some oregano in here.

And then I'm going to chop all this up and I'm going to offer it to my rabbits, and they can pick out what is good for them, what they like. So, your cool season salad, of course it's gonna look a lot different than your warm season salad. Your cool season salad is gonna have kale and beet greens and comfrey, parsley, Swiss chard, lettuce. Radish greens is a really easy one to grow. They don't like the radish so much, but the greens and then clover, grapevines, blackberry vines and then in the warm season, some of those things are going to fade and you're going to have comfrey probably still, purslane is the favorite of mine in the warm season. It kinda grows like a weed around my garden. Moringa leaves from the moringa tree, sweet potato vines. They love that. It's very good for them. Basal, plenty of that in the warm season garden and Egyptian spinach there. That is a monster. It's just a beast and they love it. That's one of my favorites too. And then another one that just grows like a weed that they can eat the whole plant is honeysuckle vine. So, if you've got honeysuckle vines growing over your fence, harvest them each day. Make a salad for your rabbits, save some money on food and you'll have healthier rabbits because of it.

Now, because of city restrictions, I can't really grow grass or tall weeds on my property, because they want things to look well-manicured here in the city, but a lot of people do grow grass and grow weeds and then they cut it with either a scythe or a line trimmer and then they offer that to their rabbits. There are also some trees that rabbits like eat, believe it or not, the Mulberry tree. I want one of those so bad. I'm going to try to get one in the fall. And then Willow trees, there's also a Willow shrub that has been developed. I don't think it's for my warm season climate, but a little bit further North, I think that would thrive. And then there's the Meringa tree that I mentioned. I grow them every year. Yeah, they die in the winter, but they get huge in one season. You can chop off the limbs, chop it up for your rabbits and for your

own family. So those are all, so those are some trees that rabbits like to eat. And then in the winter I cover my beds with a hoop cover with PVC and some frost cover and I grow kale all winter for my rabbits; also, radish greens. So, you can grow a lot of greens under that cover all during the winter of course, depending on your climate.

Some people grow a lot in the summer months and then they clip it and they dry it for forage to last them throughout the winter just like they did in the olden days. And if you do that, do it on a screen so, you have lots of ventilation and airflow and you also want to do in the shade, not in the sun. And then when you store it, no plastic bags. You want to use like old feed bags is a good ... paper bags that you can crush it up, put it in and then you can have for your winter feed all winter, hopefully all winter long. It would take a lot though to get that. Some people grow fodder in their homes, sprouted grains, that they offer to their rabbits. I have personally have not had success with that because of mold. I cannot to defeat mold when I've tried that even with good ventilation, but you know, give it a try. Your climate might be a little bit different and you might be successful at that. I know people are. And then for the first time I had my spring grow-outs on grass in rabbit tractors and I'm going to tell you a little bit more about that and show you in module five all about rabbit tractors and how to feed your grow-outs, save money, and have a healthier rabbit.

Not only is your salad going to look different from cool season to warm season, but it's going to look different depending on your climate. So, I'll leave a list in the resources, kind of with a more detailed list of all the different things you might be able to grow for your rabbits in your garden. Now introduce greens gradually, please. If your rabbits aren't used to them, you need to go a little bit at a time and make sure they get used to them before giving it to them. They could get diarrhea and you know; it could be unhealthy for them. So just gradually please. So, make a salad for your rabbits. They'll love it and you'll love it too cause it'll save you money. Come on Nugget. Hey, Nugget.

A constant supply of water is so important for your rabbits. Rabbits actually will not eat if they don't have water available. They will stop the eating and so, one way that I do the water in the summer, that's super easy and also really good for little helpers, you can send your little helpers out to do the water chore, is to just water right through the cage with the hose. So you can use flat bottom dishes or they do sell little water dishes that just clip onto the cage but you just may have to make sure that they're easy to get on and off because you're gonna need to empty them out and you're going to need to take them inside and wash them from time to time. But it makes it so easy to just water right through the cage.

One thing we used when we first started our rabbitry to water our rabbits was mugs. People gave us lots of different mugs. We had lots of various mugs and so we just decided to use those because they were free. And you can put them in the wire part of the cage and you can just wire them in with a little piece of wire and then you can just take the wire off and you can clean them out, put them through your dishwasher anytime. So that's one simple way to start watering your rabbits. You know, it's also important for me raising rabbits in the South is to make sure that my rabbits always have a constant supply of water and that means that I set up an automatic water feeder in the summer or if I go on vacation. Now this isn't a fool-proof system because it does get clogged. So, I do not just have an automatic water system on my rabbit. I have their water dishes and then this is a backup. So just in case they ever run out of water in their water dishes, they have a safety net. Come with me and we'll set up an automatic watering system together.

The first thing you're going to need to set up your automatic water system is just a bucket, some sort of water source. I got this from my grocery store deli and then you're going to need the components to your water system and I'm going to show you these individual components, but you can also order just a kit to set it up and I'll leave a link for that in the resources so, if you just want to go to Amazon and get your kit, but you can also order all the parts separately. So, I've got a hose end, a female hose end and I've got a nut there with a washer and a washer on this one and I'm just gonna put the nut with the washer in the inside and I'm just going to screw this side in. Oh, first you got to drill your hole in your bucket of course. Drill a hole in your bucket and don't forget your washers. They're important. So got a washer on this side, right there and then I'm just gonna take the end and put the washer on and I'm going to take the nut and just screw that in there. And that's going to hold my system watertight. The washers need to be replaced every summer when I put it together cause usually, they're dry; they get brittle. The next component is a hose shut off that way you can shut off your system if you need to clean it out or flush it out or anything. So, I like that and again, there's a washer. I'm going to screw that on. Alright. Next, you're going to need this part. It just has a white, a white tube that goes into

your tubing, so it fits right in there and we're gonna screw that on too. There we go and then you're going to need to order tubing and they sell it by the yard. So just lots of tubing.

And the other thing you're going to have to have are these little brass ends for each cage that you want to put it into. And I've got one here. It's just a little brass end that they can drink out of, but the tricky thing about these is that they get clogged. So oftentimes I have to take it apart, take the components apart and make sure to clean it out really good. Even take the little washer out. There's a little flow control washer; take that out and make sure everything's cleaned up really good because they get clogged with sludge. I don't know, at least in my climate with my hard water. You're gonna run the tubing for each cage and you're just going to cut it off to your measurement and you want one of these elbows, it's just got one on either side that you can hook the tubes to. Alright and this is what holds it in the cage. There's a little thing here, so once you've set it up once, you can just put your cages in the configuration you had last year, and it'll be ready to set up again.

Alright, then the next cage. It's pretty simple, just put it where they can reach it and there you have it; your automatic watering system. I just come out and I push the little valve and I check it every day, make sure it's still working for them all and it's really quick whenever I water them. And this way I'm assured that my rabbits always have water throughout the summer months or if I go on vacation and someone else is taking care of my rabbits. It's a safeguard. So, if you raise rabbits in the South, an automatic watering system is really a must for you. And one thing about it, I put it up on this plastic trashcan because obviously it needs to be raised up so that then it can drain down properly into the cages. One way to keep your rabbits safe in the summer.

So how does climate affect the way you're going to feed and water your rabbits? Well, I asked my friends up North, what is the hardest thing for you about raising rabbits in the Northern climates? And they said, well, I thought they would say frozen water crocks, that it's really hard to keep the water unfrozen. And they said, well that's true, that is hard. They do make a rubber crock. So, in the winter you can, it's flexible so you can pop out the ice easier, but the answer that they gave me, the hardest thing for them up North about raising rabbits is that during the winter there's no forage for them for feeding them. So, they're relying on the alfalfa pellets and that's costly. So, it's just for their breeders though because they wouldn't have grow-outs until springtime. So yeah, I was surprised about that. The hardest thing for me about raising backyard rabbits is trying to get them through the hump through the summer heat. They are just not meant for the summer heat and bless their hearts they just look miserable. Temps are over a hundred and we just gotta get everyone through the summer alive and well, wait for the cool weather to set in.

Thank you for joining me for module three. We learned what makes up an alfalfa pellet and how much to feed. Remember basically it's one ounce per pound of rabbit or easy, I give my rabbits a cup a day. A half a cup in the morning, half cup at night cause they're used to eating that way. It doesn't take you long to realize that you can save a lot of money if you can grow your own food for your rabbits. So, we went out to the garden, we made a salad together and went over some things that you can grow for your rabbits and some forage you can have on your property. Even some trees they can eat. I will leave a list in the resources outlining some different things that you should be able to feed your rabbits. And of course, it's gonna make a difference if you're in the South or the North, what you're going to be able to feed them during different season.

We went over some ideas for containers to hold your food. Those flat bottom dishes or the ones that clip on the cage are perfect for rabbits that way they can't spill them or poop in them. And then again, also your water, you want those flat bottom dishes or something that clips on the edge of the cage so you can just easily go by with the hose and refresh everybody really quickly every morning. Your automatic water system is just great for assuring your rabbits always have water. It's a backup though, it's not a fool proof plan. It shouldn't be their only source of water cause they do get clogged and it's hard to tell whether they're clogged or not. So, you want to use that automatic water system as a backup or when you are on vacation in the summertime.

Join me again for module four. We're going to talk about all about reading your rabbit. Now people say that breeding rabbits is so easy, they breed like rabbits, but there's a little bit more to it than that. Especially if you're having to breed like me in the winter months. Their instinct is not to breed in the winter months. Their instinct is to breed in the

springtime, but it is too hot for me to go through. So, it can be a little bit tricky. Sometimes your doe can refuse the buck. Oh, sometimes it doesn't work out at all. So, we're going to talk all about breeding; little tricks to getting that to happen successfully for a large litter for you each time. We're going to talk about preparing for those babies and what can go wrong with a first-time mom. We're gonna even have a glimpse into a wildlife rescue worker that can show us how to rescue those little babies that may be your last if something happens with mom, or if she rejects the babies. You're going to be able to successfully raise those babies or at least have a fighting chance. So, join me as we dive back into the adventure of raising backyard rabbits.