



CUISINE DE CRITTERS

BY LISA TREEN, MUTT-STER CHEF

*It's complementary,
my dear*



A couple of weeks ago I received a rather shouty email from a concerned reader in relation to a recipe we published in a past issue of Urban Animal. She was concerned that a recipe called for a clove of garlic and that garlic was toxic to dogs. She has a point – it is – but only in large amounts. Both onions and garlic contain thiosulphate and onions contain a larger amount of this.

Dogs affected by onion toxicity can develop haemolytic anaemia, where the pet's red blood cells burst while circulating in its body. Symptoms include trouble breathing, liver damage, vomiting and diarrhoea.

All forms of onion can be a problem, including dehydrated onions, raw onions, cooked onions and table scraps containing cooked onions. Many dogs have ended up at the vet's after consuming leftover pizza a few days prior. Your leftover onions from the Sunday roast or your leftover French onion soup is a no-no.

The recipe in question was for a basic omelette made with six eggs and was intended as a 'complementary' recipe for you and your pet to share. Let's explore the word 'complementary': you'll find this on labels on chilled food in the pet food section of supermarkets. 'Complementary' means to be fed in conjunction with a balanced diet, meaning with an age-, breed- and health-appropriate super premium pet food.

One of the major 'fresh' meat manufacturers in Queensland has this clearly printed on the label under the list of ingredients (we'll explore decoding ingredients in a moment). So I thought I would give the company's customer service number a call and pose the question.

The customer care person was articulate and professional and listened intently to my questions. I didn't fess up as to who I was; I merely posed as a curious consumer. Let's call him Andrew.



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Andrew was very clear and concise that they placed the wording 'complementary' on their packaging because their food is not a complete diet for dogs. "It's intended as an add-on to a complete diet suitable for your dog," he said.

Andrew even suggested that if I was unclear about what I should be feeding my dog, then

I should consult a pet care or health professional. I give him and the company he represents top marks in clarity and customer service. (And just to be clear, this company doesn't advertise with us!)

Our recipes are intended to complement your pet's diet because, let's face it – would you like to eat pasta every day? Even if it has added Omega 3 and 6, added vitamins and antioxidants.

Our recipes are also intended to add in some fresh ingredients that are tasty, safe and give an added dimension to your pet's supper dish. I am a proponent of feeding my dogs raw, meaty bones as I'm a firm believer in how they keep gums and teeth healthy, but that's my personal choice and I say this with the disclaimer that you should consult your vet as to what size and kind of bones you should feed.

Regular readers of Urban Animal will know of the situation I wrote about in the last edition with my Dalmatian Lilly's jaw disease. She's not allowed to eat raw, meaty bones as her jaw movement is restricted. A bone could get stuck and she could choke. Lilly has improved through medication but even in five months without her normal twice-weekly bones, she's developed tartar around her gums and back teeth. She's going to need to go into the vet's to have her teeth professionally cleaned.

I keep a close eye on local and international pet news through daily Google alerts, and what has concerned me recently are the pet food recalls that are happening in the US. Diamond Pet Foods manufactures multiple brands of dry pet food. Fourteen people across nine states have been hospitalised with salmonella poisoning related to Diamond's pet food. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are investigating the outbreak. The infection is possibly from people touching the dog food and then touching their own food, cross-contamination from products that touched the tainted pet food, or from direct contact with a dog that had a salmonella infection. Salmonella is not pretty to people or to pets.

The shame of all of this is that consumers in the US can recognise Diamond's own brand of food but may not realise that the manufacturer has a relationship with other brands. Another shame of all of these 'voluntary recalls' is that the news is announced as late as possible on a Friday afternoon. It's called the 'dump and run'. As one pet

industry blogger explains, "In the pet food industry,

as with others, there's a disturbing tendency to convey bad news (read: recalls) as late as possible on Friday afternoon. This is when the fewest people will be paying attention, and the company fervently hopes you won't notice they've just admitted to having sold you product that may sicken or kill your beloved pet. There's a term for this practice.

It's called "dump and run," or "Friday dump and run." They leave their office, and customer service phone numbers may be set to recordings for the weekend. From Friday through

Monday, you could well have nobody to speak to, to ask questions of, or to complain to."

And if you think in Australia we're immune, we're not. Bad things have happened here before.

But back to the decoding of food labels... Well, I'm going to leave this to the Spring edition because it takes a load of interpretation. But it's an eye-opener!

So let's instead explore a couple of complementary recipes that use a favourite ingredient of mine for dogs (but not for cats as it can cause serious diarrhoea in kitties).



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Pumpkin. *I love adding it into stews; I love it roasted and I love it made into a simple but tummy-warming soup. And as the winter months take hold, I like to be able to add warm foods to my dogs' regular meals.*

PUMPKIN & PEA CASSEROLE

Ingredients

- 1 x 375ml carton vegetable stock
- 2/3 cup rice
- 200g butternut pumpkin, peeled, cut into 2cm cubes
- 1/3 cup frozen peas
- 2 slices bacon

Method

Preheat oven to 180°C. Place stock in a small saucepan. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat.

Meanwhile, heat oil in a flameproof, ovenproof casserole dish over medium heat. Add rice. Add stock and pumpkin. Stir to combine. Cover and bring to the boil. Remove to oven. Bake for 20 minutes or until pumpkin is tender.

Remove from oven. Sprinkle peas over rice mixture. Cover and return to oven. Bake for a further 5 minutes or until liquid is nearly all absorbed. Remove from oven.

Meanwhile, preheat grill on high. Place bacon on a baking tray lined with foil. Grill for 1 to 2 minutes or until crisp and golden. Break into large pieces.

Divide risotto among bowls. Top with bacon. Allow to cool so that it's just slightly warmer than room temperature before serving a cup over normal food.

EASY PUMPKIN SOUP

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1.25kg butternut pumpkin, peeled, seeds removed, cut into 2cm pieces
- 2 cups vegetable stock
- 2 cups water

Method

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add pumpkin, stock and water. Cover. Cook for 20 to 25 minutes or until pumpkin is tender.

Blend soup in batches. Return to saucepan. Heat over medium heat until lukewarm and then serve half a cup over normal food.



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