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“If your dog really is your best friend, feed your best friend better,” Rick Woodford says. Real food, he claims, makes dogs feel good, improves health and can reduce allergies and behavioral problems. “And it makes them really, really happy.”

While most Portland humans have jumped onto the local, seasonal and organic food train, there seems to be a growing interest in giving their pets a ride, too.

Last weekend, Woodford showed off his canine culinary skills at In Good Taste Cooking School in the Pearl District.

The full class had a baker’s dozen of students, mostly women and all avid dog-lovers. Almost everyone in the class had tried cooking at home for their dogs before – one previously had taken a dog cooking class.



KATIE HARTLEY / TRIBUNE PHOTO
Dog lovers fill the seats at In Good Taste as Rick Woodford (right) leads a class on creating healthy homemade meals for four-legged friends.

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Wendy Cornstock has an 11-year-old Jack Russell terrier named Hannah. She took the class because she wants more control over where Hannah's nutrition is coming from.

Last year's pet food recall shook many dog owners, and many participants expressed the desire to ensure that their dogs were getting good, quality ingredients.

Woodford is the founder of Dog Stew – a local business that delivers home-cooked, balanced meals to Portland pooches. He emphasized the importance of good canine nutrition, which often can be incomplete even in high-end commercial dog foods.

While the class members sipped sparkling water and wine, Woodford demonstrated how to make Mutt Loaf – which, made of ground beef, grated vegetables, herbs and more, smelled incredibly good.

The addition of bone meal powder and cherry-flavored cod liver oil may have made it less appealing to human taste buds, but Woodford said one of the biggest mistakes people make when cooking for dogs is failing to give vitamin supplements.

Like their owners, dogs need culinary variety – not so much to keep them interested, but to provide nutritional balance. And dogs should eat seasonal fruits and vegetables, too – with some exceptions, like grapes, which are toxic to dogs.

And some good news for our hungry canine friends: Using the charts Woodford provided in class, I learned that even though my dog, Lakshmi, is a 60-pound husky and I'm a 120-pound woman, she and I require nearly the same number of calories.

Woodford helpfully kept track of who had what kind and size of dog, and made comments during the demonstration about which dog would need what portion size of the current recipe.

One couple described their 115-pound chocolate lab as a "Labasaurus." One lady said she had four dogs, three of whom each have only one eye – "so I've got four dogs and only five eyes between them."

Woodford also demonstrated how to make Pumpkin Puppy Puffs and Barkscotti. At the end of the two-hour class, we were laden with samples of Dog Stew, Mutt Loaf, Barkscotti, Nesbitt's Liver Jerky and Pumpkin Puffs, and a folder full of recipes to try at home.

Believe it or not, Woodford believes in taste-testing, so even though I'm not the target market I sampled the wares, too.

The Barkscotti doesn't taste as processed as Lakshmi's regular dry food or treats, and I easily could identify the carrot, parsley and beef flavors – minus the seasonings.

I also tried the Mutt Loaf, Dog Stew and a Pumpkin Puff and was pleasantly surprised by them all.

Lakshmi was wary of having Dog Stew mixed into her regular food and took cautious bites of the Mutt Loaf, but she was quickly a happy convert.

Now that I've given her Barkscotti, Pumpkin Puffs and even Liver Jerky, my husky thinks I'm some kind of fairy dogmother. You might not whip up Woodford's canine recipes for your next human cocktail party, but they're rather tasty for dog and owner alike, in an unseasoned, whole-foods kind of way.

In my experience, it's been more expensive to cook for dogs than to feed them

commercial food. It's difficult to make an apples-to-apples comparison, however, when there are so many different dog foods available and home-cooking costs can be reduced by buying ingredients in bulk.

Woodford recommends buying ingredients wherever you feel comfortable shopping for yourself –so no stocking up at Save-A-Lot unless you shop there for the two-legged members of your family.

If you're just starting out, he suggests consulting "Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats." The tome already was in the kitchen of nearly everyone in the class.

"The one thing you can't get from a bag or a can is your own personal attention and your love," Woodford says.

Plenty of Portlanders obviously are willing to devote themselves to their pooches' diets. There was a waiting list for this past Saturday's class.

In Good Taste will host Woodford's Cooking for Canines again (cost is \$45) on April 5.

Dog Stew's Barkscotti **Courtesy of Rick Woodford**

- 1/3 cup beef stock, home-prepared or low-sodium
- 1/3 cup parsley, finely chopped
- 1/3 cup grated carrots
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3/4 cup barley flour
- 3/4 cup rye flour

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

Heat beef broth until hot, about two minutes in microwave.

In a medium-size mixing bowl, combine broth with carrots, parsley and garlic powder. Let steep for a couple of minutes to soften slightly.

Stir olive oil into carrot mixture until blended, then mix in the barley flour until fully incorporated.

Stir in rye flour. When dough begins to come together, knead inside the bowl until all the flour is incorporated, about two minutes. Dough should be moist, but not sticky.

Roll dough into 8-inch log. Flatten log until it is 2 1/2 inches wide and about 1 inch high. Press gently to form loaf into a dome shape. Cut into thin strips, 1/3 inch wide.

Stand individual cookies upright on pan, dome side up, about one inch apart.

Bake for one hour, then turn oven off and let the cookies rest in the oven for an additional hour.

When cookies have cooled, store in airtight container.

Makes about 24 cookies.

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