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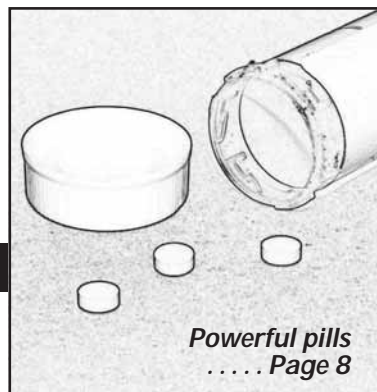
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# Mixing It Up

*“Pre-mixes” are an easy way to try preparing your dog’s food yourself.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**W**e frequently write about kibble and canned dog food, but have neglected some of the less common (but no less worthy) types of commercial foods. Here’s a look at commercial products that make it easy to feed a home-prepared diet.

Coming up with a really fitting name for this product category is difficult, since each manufacturer we’ve included formulates its products differently. We’ll call them all “dog food pre-mixes” – but be aware that their formulations vary widely. Corraling these diverse products into one category may be a stretch, given the products’ differences:

- Five of the seven manufacturers produce a dog food “base” containing grains and vegetables, to which a dog owner adds fresh meat to complete the diet.
- All but one of the products contain dehydrated ingredients; water is added to rehydrate them. The one exception is Spectrum’s “Just Add Base Mix,” which is

actually an extruded food; the owner adds only fresh meat.

- A few of the products are intended to be cooked. The others are simply rehydrated with water and soaked before serving.
- Two of these companies make products that can be fed alone for “complete and balanced” nutrition; they meet the nutritional profiles of the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) *without* the inclusion of meat or anything else. These products are also the only ones that were formulated with the AAFCO nutrient profiles in mind. Given that they are “complete” diets, we included them in our “food pre-mix” category only because their makers encourage consumers to add meat and other ingredients if they want to. In the case of The Honest Kitchen, the foods are even formulated to maintain a proper calcium/phosphorus ratio of 1:1 to 2:1 even if meat and vegetables are added.

Other than The Honest Kitchen and Spectrum, none of the makers formulated their products to meet AAFCO’s nutrient profiles. All expressed confidence that their products, prepared as directed, provide nourishment that is superior to that provided by conventional commercial dog foods.

- Except for the products made by The Honest Kitchen, and one by Spectrum, all of the products require the addition of fresh meat (raw or cooked) to complete the food.
- Most of the products contain herbs; some contain just one or two, some contain quite a variety. A few of the products contain other novel ingredients such as bee pollen.
- Most of the companies use at least some organic ingredients; a couple use *all* organic ingredients, except for the vitamin/mineral supplement used in the pre-mix. We are not aware of any organic vitamin/mineral mixes that are available to pet food manufacturers.



**All the dog food pre-mixes are made with the highest quality “human” ingredients, such as brown rice, steel-cut oats, broccoli, carrots, peas, parsley, etc.**

- Speaking of vitamin/mineral mixes, only three of the companies contain these supplements. Happy Dog’s products are mixed with a separate vitamin/mineral supplement (provided with the food).
- Two companies’ products require the addition of some sort of oil supplement.

## Not rated or ranked

In our reviews of dry and canned foods, we make specific recommendations for selecting products for your dog. We’re not going to do this here; instead, we simply want to inform you about these alternatives to conventional kibble and canned food, and describe the differences between them.

We like the concept of a pre-mix that helps dog owners more easily prepare a complete and balanced diet with fresh, top-quality ingredients, and all of these products accomplish that goal. All of the products have a fresh, appealing aroma and appearance. However, some of their makers do a better job of providing information and support to consumers, and on the next two pages, we’ll note these efforts (or lack thereof) with our descriptions of the foods.


When suggested feeding amounts were provided for a range of dog sizes, we quoted the amount suggested for a 30-pound dog.

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### WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Look for products that contain ingredients that your dog thrives on – and that do not contain anything he can’t tolerate.**
- **Buy products that contain organic ingredients if your dog has special health needs, such as cancer or severe allergies.**
- **Consider and calculate the cost of feeding these products. They make it easy to provide home-prepared foods for your dog, but they *are* expensive.**

PRODUCT MAKER, CONTACT INFO	INGREDIENTS	PREPARATION DIRECTIONS
<p>Dr. H's Canine Health Formula Dr. Harvey's Keansburg, NJ (866) 362-4123 drharveys.com</p> 	<p>First 6 ingredients organic: brown rice, kamut, oats, spelt, barley, triticale. Then, potatoes, carrots, zucchini, sweet potatoes, peas, broccoli, green beans, beets, parsley, lecithin, garlic, bee pollen, nutr. yeast, alfalfa, rose hips, red clover, oat straw, flaxseed meal, papaya, rosemary, dandelion, peppermint, ginger, spirulina, fenugreek, basil, fennel.</p>	<p>For one lb of finished dog food: Boil 7½ oz water. Add 2½ oz of Dr. Harvey's Canine Health. Simmer for 8 minutes. Let cool. Add 6 oz of beef, chicken, turkey, lamb, soy, or lentils. Add 1 tsp each of flaxseed oil, wheat germ oil, and sunflower oil or 3 tsp Dr. H's Health &amp; Shine oil (sold separately).</p>
<p>Happy Dog "Express" Happy Dog "Original" Happy Dog Aromas, CA (800) 359-9576 happydogfood.com</p> 	<p>Express: barley, steel cut oats, carrots, peas, bell peppers, parsley, garlic, rosemary, alfalfa, vit/mins. Original: pearl barley, brown rice, carrots, peas, bell peppers, parsley, garlic, rosemary, alfalfa, vit/mins.</p>  	<p>Express: Mix 4 oz Express with 8 oz boiling water. Let soak for 10-15 minutes. Add 4 oz meat, sprinkle with the vitamin supplement (included), stir, and serve. Original: Mix 13 oz Original with 1 lb meat, 8 cups water, and heat to boiling. Simmer for 35 minutes. Let cool, stir in vitamin supplement. Refrigerate immediately.</p>
<p>The Honest Kitchen's Dehydrated Dog Foods (Embark, Force, Verve) The Honest Kitchen, Inc San Diego, CA (858) 483-5995 thehonestkitchen.com</p> 	<p>Embark contains turkey, organic flaxseed, potatoes, celery, spinach, carrots, coconut, apples, kelp, eggs, sesame seeds, bananas, cranberries, rosemary, vitamins, minerals. Force contains chicken, org. flaxseed, potatoes, celery, cabbage, sweet potatoes, zucchini, green beans, apples, honey, alfalfa, kelp, yogurt, bananas, papaya, basil, garlic, rosemary, vitamins, minerals. Verve contains org. rolled barley, org. rolled rye, dehydrated beef, org. rolled oats, org. flaxseed, carrots, alfalfa, potatoes, eggs, spinach, red and green bell peppers, apples, chicory, parsley, cranberries, rosemary, peppermint, vitamins, minerals.</p>	<p>Stir 4 oz (about ½ cup) mix with 1¼ to 1½ c. water. Maker recommends using pure, warm filtered or tap water, or boiled, cooled water; water that is at boiling temperature is not recommended. Soak for 10 minutes, minimum. Adding raw or cooked meat, meaty bones, or other ingredients is optional.</p> 
<p>Monzie's Organic Muesli Monzie's Organics Sebastopol, CA (707) 824-1031 monzies.com</p> 	<p>Organic oats, org. barley flakes, org. rye flakes, org. quinoa flakes, org. flaxseed, org. sunflower seeds, org. alfalfa, org. dandelion, kelp, carob, vegetable broth, garlic, parsley.</p>	<p>Add 1½ - 2 c. hot or boiling water to every cup of mix. Let soak for about 30 minutes. Add ½ c. protein (beef, turkey, lamb, chicken, cottage cheese, or boiled egg) and ½ c. raw, grated vegetables (such as carrots, celery, or zucchini).</p>
<p>Noah's Kingdom Dog Food Pre-Mix Noah's Kingdom Sales, LLC Oakhurst, NJ (800) 662-4711 noahskingdom.com</p>	<p>First 6 ingredients organic: quinoa, spelt, kamut, oats, barley, triticale. Then: carrots, peas, potatoes, parsley, sweet potatoes, broccoli, beets, garlic, nutr. yeast powder, red clover, rose hips, alfalfa, oat straw, bee pollen, dandelion root, flaxseed meal, papaya, rosemary, peppermint, lecithin, spirulina, ginger, fenugreek.</p>	<p>Boil 7½ oz of water. Add 2½ oz of mix and let steep for eight minutes. Add 6 oz protein and 1 tsp each flaxseed oil, wheat germ oil, and sunflower oil. Allow to cool and serve.</p> 
<p>Sojo's European-Style Pet Food Mix Sojourner Farms Minneapolis, MN (888) 867-6567 sojos.com</p> 	<p>Oat flakes, rye flakes, yellow corn meal, wheat flakes, ground pecans, dried kelp, carob powder, parsley leaf, nettles leaf.</p> 	<p>Mix 1 c. Sojo's with ½ c. meat (rotate among beef, turkey, or chicken) and 2 c. water. Maker suggests you also add a rotating variety of chopped raw or steamed vegetables, such as potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, and carrots; raw apple and banana may be added also.</p>
<p>Spectrum Pet Care's "Just Add Base Mix" and "Mix &amp; Fix" Spectrum Pet Care Montgomery City, MO (866) 354-2832 epetfood.com</p> 	<p>Just Add: All ingredients except vit/min supplement are organic – ground rice, ground barley, ground oats, flaxseed, canola oil, vit/min supplement. Mix &amp; Fix: turkey meal, org. oatmeal, org. ground rice, org. ground barley, org. flaxseed, org. canola oil, vit/min supplement.</p>  	<p>Just Add: Mix equal amounts of Just Add and fresh protein; maker suggests rotating between a variety of proteins: chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, venison, lean pork, white fish. Microwave or heat on stovetop. Mix &amp; Fix: Stir together 1 c. Mix &amp; Fix with ½ c. water. Heat for one minute in microwave or heat in pan on stovetop.</p>

SUGGESTED FEEDING AMTS	PRICE, AVAILABILITY	COMMENTS
One lb of food, prepared as directed, for average medium-sized (20-50 lb) dog daily. Adjust to suit.	20 oz = \$12; 10 lb = \$70 Available from online dealers and select pet supply stores; not sold direct from maker.	<p>Mix contains 12% (min) crude protein, 3% (min) crude fat, 5% (max) crude fiber. Upon request, maker will provide analysis of food mixed according to directions with several different proteins and Dr. H's Health &amp; Shine Oil.</p>  <p>The product is very colorful, with an appealing aroma and appearance. We found the "suggested feeding amounts" section of the product literature to be quite confusing, but this, frankly, is a common shortcoming in this product category.</p>
For a 26-50 lb dog: Start with 1 c. of mix. Prepare as directed. Adjust to suit.	Express: 2½ lb = \$7; 20 lb = \$45 Original: 3½ lb = \$14; 25 lb = \$81  Maker sells online and by phone; available in select pet supply stores.	Express mix contains 11.9% (min) crude protein, 4.4% (max) crude fat, and 2% (max) crude fiber. Calcium is 0.08% (max); phosphorus is 0.37% (max). Original mix contains 10.3% (min) crude protein, 2.4% (max) crude fat, and 1.7% (max) crude fiber. Calcium is 0.07% (max); phosphorus is 0.28% (max). Happy Dog does not provide caloric information or an analysis of the prepared food with meat and/or vegetable additions. A vitamin/mineral powder is packaged separately to preserve freshness, and is added when food is cool to preserve potency.
For a 30 lb dog: Start with 1 c. (4 oz) of mix. Prepare as directed. Adjust to suit your dog's requirements according to age, breed, and activity.	Embark: 4 lb = \$37; 10 lb = \$72  Force: 4 lb = \$34; 10 lb = \$69  Verve: 4 lb = \$24; 10 lb = \$48  Sold direct from maker. Special pricing available for service animals, breeders, rescue groups, shelters, and other 401c(3) charities and bulk sales.	All of these dehydrated foods meet the AAFCO nutrient profiles for a "complete and balanced" diet. Maker says people with younger or more active dogs may wish to add fresh meat or vegetables; the foods are formulated so that the calcium/phosphorus ratio will remain between 1:1 and 2:1 if meat and/or vegetables are added. The Honest Kitchen has received a "statement of no objection" from the FDA regarding its use of the term "human grade" on all of its dehydrated pet foods – a first in the industry – and the foods are made in a human food plant. Embark is intended for puppies, active dogs, and grain-intolerant dogs. It contains 29% protein (min), 16% fat (min), 9.6% (max) fiber. Force has 21% (min) protein, 14% (min) fat, and 5.5% (max) fiber, and is suggested for less active, older, and grain-intolerant dogs. Verve contains grains and has 21% (min) protein, 7.5% (min) fat, and 5% (max) fiber. The Honest Kitchen makes a complete nutrient profile for each food available on request. Addressing the fact that people might add a variety of ingredients, a spokesman says it's not feasible to provide amended nutrient profiles for every scenario of what might be mixed in. But they take the impressive extra step of pointing consumers toward resources that enable calculation of exact nutrient levels for the food with any combination of additions.
For a 30 lb dog: Use 1-2 c. mix. Prepare as directed. Adjust to suit.	8 lb = \$28; 20 lb = \$56. Sold direct from maker and in select pet supply stores.	Intended as a base for dog's diet; add meat or vegetarian protein (nuts, beans, boiled egg) and vegetables to complete food. Mix contains 15% (min) crude protein, 9% (min) fat, and 9% (max) crude fiber.
Maker suggests feeding same amount (by weight) of food, prepared as directed, that dog is already consuming.	20 oz = \$13; 5 lb = \$43; 10 lb = \$82. Sold direct from maker and in select pet supply stores.	Intended as a base for dog's diet; add protein and oil as per directions to complete food. Mix contains 13% (min) protein, 3% (min) fat, and 5% (max) fiber. Again, we found the suggested feeding amounts to be sketchy – a weakness shared by most products in this category. Consumers must observe their dogs' weight and condition and adjust amounts accordingly. Noah's Kingdom offers an introductory discount on its food to WDJ readers.
For a 30 lb dog: Start with 1 c. mix. Prepare as described. Adjust portion as needed.	10 lb = \$20; 25 lb = \$46; 40 lb = \$70. Sold direct from maker and in select pet supply stores. Maker does not charge for shipping if bought direct.	Intended as a base; add meat and vegetables to complete diet. Mix contains 13.1% (min) crude protein, 5.2% (min) crude fat, and 1.9% (max) crude fiber. Analysis of food mixed with various proteins and other ingredients available upon request. Company was founded in 1985 – the first maker of this type of product in the U.S. Price of food is lowest in category. Date of manufacture printed on label. Maker plans to offer a non-grain formula by fall 2004. Representatives are unfailingly polite, knowledgeable, and helpful.
Just Add: 1 c. finished food, prepared as described, per 7½ lbs body weight. Mix & Fix: 1½ c. finished food per 15 lbs body weight.	Just Add: 3.3 lb = \$15; 8.8 lb = \$20  Mix & Fix: 3.3 lb = \$15; 8.8 lb = \$20	Just Add Base Mix contains 16% (min) protein, 6% (min) fat, and 10% (max) fiber. Consumer adds only fresh meat, no water. After addition of meat to maker's specifications, average content is 28% (min) protein, 8% (min) fat, and 4% (max) fiber. Product appearance is very different from the rest in this category; it is an extruded kibble containing no meat. Mix & Fix is a dehydrated, complete diet (contains meat already). It contains 24% (min) protein, 12% (min) fat, and 4.5% (max) fiber. Spectrum regards its organic certification (through QAI) to be superior, and encourages consumers to ask for copies of companies' organic certification.

