

# Can Chickens Eat Mashed Potatoes?



Can chickens eat mashed potatoes? Believe it or not, too much of any food can upset the delicate balance in the chicken's digestive tract. Being Omnivores means that technically, chickens can eat anything they want to eat. Their diet in the wild would consist of varied plants, bugs, dead animals, and live rodents. However, they have some of the choice taken away from them when we keep them in coops and runs.

Faced with a delicious plate of mashed potatoes, next to the regular dish of layer feed, the chicken is going to binge eat those potatoes! In the wild, they wouldn't have this handed to them in such a great quantity. And there's the key to the

question, can chickens eat mashed potatoes. They can, but everything should be offered in moderation. Offering too much of any food besides layer feed, free range grasses and bugs, can lead to stomach upset.

## **Can Chickens Eat Vegetables Fresh From the Garden?**

What about other foods commonly left over from our family meals. Cooked vegetables are almost always ok to serve to your chickens. Can chickens eat all vegetables raw, right from the garden? The answer to that would no. Some raw vegetables contain chemicals that are toxic to chickens. Vegetables from the nightshade family includes, potatoes, peppers, tomatoes and eggplants. The solonine in these plants is the toxic substance that can build up in the chicken and cause toxicity and death. The fruit of the tomato and the pepper is fine in moderation, when it its fully ripe. Never allow your chickens to feast on the tomato plants, pepper plants or any of the green leaves from the nightshade family.



**Note\*** Sweet Potatoes are not from the nightshade family. They are from the morning glory family and the sweet potato and the leaves are both safe to eat.

**Greens** – Most greens are good for chickens. The exception would be spinach which contains a heavy amount of oxalic acid. This compound, in large quantities can interfere with the absorption of calcium. Small amounts of spinach aren't a problem but large or frequent feedings of spinach, beet greens or Chard might lead to soft egg shells.

The leafy lettuces, kale and other greens are great treats for the flock.

# Can Chickens Eat Dairy Foods Like Cheese, Milk, Yogurt?

During a recent episode of viral information on social media, a discussion was going on about whether or not chickens can have dairy foods without consequences. There was a huge response with people again arguing that they do so all the time, and have no stomach upset in the flock. Others mentioned that chickens lack the enzyme necessary to digest milk protein (lactose). Yogurt can provide a boost of calcium, protein, energy, and probiotics and yes yogurt is a healthy food for humans. Chickens can benefit from small amounts of unsweetened plain yogurt. It does provide some probiotic benefits.

However, it is a dairy product. Large amounts of dairy are not good because it can lead to loose stools and upset stomachs. So again, we come back to that age old rule of moderation and small amounts. Feeding a large bowl of yogurt might not kill your chickens or lead to toxicity but it probably will cause some digestive upset.

## **HOLD THE YOGURT!**

**Yogurt does NOT cause us chickens to lay more eggs**

**We like a taste of yogurt once in awhile but too much will upset our tummies**

**We lay about 5 to 7 eggs a week during late winter, spring and summer**

**Feeding us a proper diet of layer ration, vegetables, greens, and bugs will keep us laying in good health**

**Luv, The Chickens**



## **Most Chickens Don't Like Citrus Fruit**

There are differing opinions on feeding citrus. There isn't any definite evidence that it is harmful. Too much citrus and

vitamin C, can lead to weaker egg shells because it interferes with Calcium absorption . I am not too worried about this because mine reject citrus fruit anyway. I have heard this from many other chicken owners.



## Meat Scraps

Being omnivores, chickens can handle eating meat protein. Have you seen the excitement when they catch a field mouse? Even a snake is a delicious form of meat. So feeding them the carcass from a roasted chicken, if you aren't making bone stock, is fine. Fried or fatty meat should be avoided and anything cooked in a heavy sauce could lead to diarrhea.



## Legumes and Beans

Fully cooked beans can be fed to the chickens. Raw beans of all kinds contain hemagglutinin which is a natural insecticide and toxic. The cooking or sprouting of beans or dried beans destroys the chemical and then the beans are safe to feed to the chickens. So your leftover green beans and other legumes from dinner are perfectly fine to give as a treat.

## A Few Other Foods to Mention

**Onions and Garlic** are from the same family but contain different chemical make up. The allium family, particularly onions, contain large amounts of thiosulphate, a toxin. It is interesting though, that garlic contains very little thiosulphate. Garlic is completely safe and extremely healthy to add to the chickens diet.

**Chocolate, caffeine, and alcohol** are three of my favorite treats. But the chickens should have none of these substances.

**Avocados**– These actually do contain a fatal toxin in some parts of the avocado. I do not give any part of this to my flock.

**Apples**– Some people may mention that fruits with seeds and pits can be toxic, too. They can but it's a much lower toxicity and mostly the chickens will just eat the fruit. To be safe, cut up the apple and don't feed the cores. Remove the peach pits. This is not a problem with watermelon which is a favorite treat!

**Rhubarb** – This is toxic in so many parts that I wouldn't take the chance of feeding it to my flock. The leaves are toxic to people too so be sure to avoid them in your foraging.



## **Toxin Build Up in Chickens**

I know many will read this and argue that they or their

grandparents always fed the chickens green tomatoes, or onions, or any number of things, and no chickens died. And they would be correct. Very few toxins will kill people or animals immediately. However, toxins eaten on a regular basis or in such an amount that buildup occurs over time, will die or become sick. You may not tie it back to the potato peels you fed to the chickens three times a week. Or the free ranging in the garden where they had access to pepper plant leaves and potato vines.

It's the same with people. Toxins in our food build up in our bodies over time. We are just beginning to realize that plastic packaging, chemical dyes, and other contaminants can cause problems with kidneys, nervous system, and the heart. The liver is a prime candidate for toxin build up leading to disease too. Our poultry and livestock are no different. They can eat many different foods that we share with them. It doesn't mean it is without risk or without an effect further down the road.

## **What to do**

My final point to answer the question "can chickens eat...?" is this. As our grandmothers said, everything in moderation. In the past, few farmers kept a large flock of chickens over the winter. The best layers might have been kept but most were processed for food so they didn't have to be fed through the winter when free ranging food was scarce. Not keeping hens past a year or two probably didn't show the toxicity symptoms that might show up in older hens. This is your flock. You get to make the decisions. Remember that not every bad decision will have an immediate consequence. Also, not everything you do is not going to endanger the life of your chicken.

Feeding a good quality layer feed, supplemented with safe foraging and free ranging, and delicious safe treats from your kitchen will help you keep a healthy flock. Meal worms and

dehydrated grubs are tasty treats that normally don't lead to problems. Remember that the answer to "can chickens eat" this food is, only in moderation.





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