

# **Homemade Raw Food Diet for Pets:**

## **A Special Interview with Pol Sandro-Yepes**

By Dr. Karen Becker

**KB: Dr. Karen Becker**

**PY: Pol Sandro-Yepes**

**KB:** Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker. Today, I have a really fun guest with me. Today, I'm interviewing Pol Sandro-Yepes. He is really an avid dog lover. I actually met Pol because he emailed me a video of him making homemade dog food. It was so fun for me to watch that I asked if he would be willing to Skype with me and share a little bit about how he got into the passion of making homemade dog food. He's got some great stories about the history of how homemade pet food came to be in his life. We have a link at the bottom of this article associated with his video, where you can see the video that he made, which is really fun. He put into some great music. It shows how easy it can be and how organized his system is because he's kind of mastered it.

Professionally, Pol is an IT manager in Mission Viejo, California. He lives there with his partner of 22 years, Andy. They have two grown kids, one Labrador retriever whose name is Austin, and one blue-and-gold macaw named Dante. Welcome, Pol. Thanks for joining me.

**PY:** Thank you.

**KB:** Talk to me. Share with us and our readers, audience, and listeners why you got interested in homemade dog food or how you even came across the concept of deciding to switch from a commercially prepared diet to homemade food.

**PY:** Sure. I guess it was about four years ago we lost our Dalmatian, our 13-year-old Dalmatian. About two years ago, we decided to get another puppy, and we decided on a Labrador. As we started planning for the puppy, we started talking about doggy daycare, we started talking about training, we started talking about all the crate training, and we came to the conversation about diet. My Dalmatian, Chaucer, towards the end of his life had really bad urinary issues, started to get paralysis, and those types of things. We want to take a look to see if there was something else we could do from a food perspective for the new puppy.

Andy went online. He started doing all this research, and he came across your video The 10 Best and Worst Foods for Your Dog. He was sold. He sent me the email to my work address. I listened to it, and I thought, "Well, there's only one answer." From the beginning, we started the Labrador, Austin, on a raw food diet. We have seen just amazing results with that. We now have quite a few people who've joined our little dog food grinding consortium because they recognize that it's a very healthy diet. We actually control what the dogs eat and the quality of the food.

Austin's brother, Sterling, he was adopted by some very good friends of ours. When they came over, they saw what we were doing, they saw our dog's coat, and they saw his weight, they thought, "We're just

going to go ahead and join.” There are actually three of us now that grind food for our dogs every eight weeks.

**KB:** That’s awesome. From the video, it looks like... I mean, really, it shows how when you kind of become a master of raw feeding how quickly and easily it kind of comes together. You’ve worked through the kinks. You have a system down. It’s so cool to see how other people do it, which is why it was inspiring for me to talk to you. When you very first started making homemade food... For most people, it’s scary. It’s a little overwhelming. You don’t really have a system yet. You’re afraid of doing it wrong. Initially, it’s not as easy as it looks on your video. Talk to me about what you and Andy felt when you very first did this.

**PY:** It was interesting. We have the book. We sort of used it as a stepping guide for everything that we used. We actually used all three recipes. We agreed that the fallacy of never changing your dog’s diet was truly that, a fallacy.

**KB:** Yup.

**PY:** When we recognized that, we got very excited. We immediately said, “Let’s try all of the three recipes.” We did them in batches as shown in the video. The first time we did it, the kinks or the things that didn’t work out is when you start buying the quantities of dog food... When you buy a chicken, you don’t realize how much waste of fat is there on the skin. We actually had to run back and forth to the store to make sure that we had enough of just the pure protein to make the diet.

**KB:** Sure.

**PY:** That was sort of an interesting way. We also found that we have to get a large grinder to handle the bulk of food that we did... The smaller grinder that I had, we realized was not going to do the trick for us, because we really did want to use the bones for the chicken for the calcium and those types of things. We decided to buy a larger grinder. I won’t lie to you – it does take some time to do some grinding of food.

**KB:** It does.

**PY:** Especially for three large dogs.

**KB:** You bet.

**PY:** We only want to do it once every eight weeks. We did get a reach-in freezer as well to make sure that we had room to store the food.

**KB:** You’ve kind of evolved into having this kind of group, almost like a food co-op. You guys all get together. You basically make dog food together every eight weeks. That’s such an awesome way to do it. First of all, it becomes social. You know that you’re picking the fruits, veggies, and the meats. You see them. You grind them. You cut them up. You know what’s going into your pet food. That’s a huge peace of mind for you. You know there are no contaminants. You know that there are no ingredients that you didn’t put in there. But the cool thing is you’re doing it every other month. How long does it take you to make food for three dogs for eight weeks? I mean, is it an eight-hour process or a six-hour process?

**PY:** It’s about a 10-hour process.

**KB:** Yup.

**PY:** Not counting the shopping. Again, they’re large dogs. But again, you’re right. It is social. It is a lot of fun. We sort of switch who does what, whether it’s carving up the meat, carving off the fat, versus the portioning. It’s actually a good time.

**KB:** Yeah, which is good. You are making foods every two months because that works for your lifestyle. You're able to get together and hammer it out. You make foods for three big dogs for two months. That's a lot of time, 10 hours, like you said. A lot of people, their biggest complaint is, "I don't think I have the time." And really, the convenience of buying a commercially available food is just that: it's wildly convenient. But it's pretty expensive. You're able to actually ultimately reduce a lot of your cost because you're making it yourself. The tradeoff would be your time commitment.

You've been able to work out a system that allows you to only prepare food every other month. But you had to make some investment, which in that situation, is a freezer. Your investments economically have been a big ol' freezer... How big is your freezer?

**PY:** Oh, it's large. I can probably put three large bodies in it.

**KB:** Okay, I believe that. Exactly. Three cows, maybe. And then you also had to buy a grinder.

**PY:** Right.

**KB:** Where did you end up? Did you end up reading reviews? How did you find your grinder? Did you go to Cabela's? Or did you read reviews? What did you do for finding your tools?

**PY:** Yeah, we did. We did a lot of reviews to find out which would be best for us, knowing that we were going to be grinding turkey bones as well as chicken bones.

**KB:** Yup.

**PY:** We ended up going to Cabela – I think we found it through your website as well – and got their largest grinder.

**KB:** Are you happy with it?

**PY:** I am thrilled with it.

**KB:** Okay, that's wonderful. Pol was able to decide from early on that they – he and his partner Andy – wanted to put their dog on a raw food diet right away. I'm proud of him because he's done two things: he's figured out a system that reduces stress on his life and works for his personal circumstances, where every other month he's able to create a huge batch of food. He has a food co-op, where he is working with a couple of other friends to be able to kind of mass produce in their kitchen food for all of their families, which is awesome.

But he has stuck with the recipe. That's one of the things I'm a stickler for: making sure that if you're going to make a homemade diet – especially because he was raising Austin from a puppy at eight weeks – that the calcium and phosphorus ratio is correct, and that the trace mineral ratio is correct. It's very important that he follows a recipe that has been proved to be nutritionally complete. And you've done that.

When you first made the vitamin and mineral mix... I would say the second biggest question about my book is, "Okay, I get the concept of homemade foods. I like to be able to pick up my own ingredients. I like the recipes. But boy, it seems very tedious. It seems overwhelming when I first read it. I don't want to make the vitamin and mineral mix." Did you have a hard time making that? Or was it no big deal for you?

**PY:** Yeah, it was really no big deal. I think everything that was being called for in the recipes both from the veggies, the meats, and the vitamins and minerals were very easy to get hold of. I like sticking to the recipe because it makes it so easy. Once you do it the first two times, it's like routine. You don't have to think about it.

**KB:** Yes.

**PY:** It's absolutely phenomenal.

**KB:** If you can compare... You've had Austin on this diet for his whole life. It's hard to know what he would have been like if he was fed kibble prior. But tell us about some of the changes that you notably, that you can see maybe comparing to the Dalmatian that you had prior. I mean, we know that their poo size is smaller. They have smaller poo.

**PY:** Almost definitely. Most definitely.

**KB:** Yes. And coat?

**PY:** Like what I said, when his brother came over, his coat was much more dry. He had skin issues. It would almost look like dandruff. When they looked at our dog, his coat was much more silkier. His skin had definitely very little dandruff and little dander. That alone was enough to see that there was a health benefit that was there. Again, like you said, he started from a puppy.

We actually had... At his one year birthday, we invited all of his brothers and sisters. We had 10 puppies – now dogs, one year-olds – at our house. It was amazing to see the body structure that was different from our dog and his brother, Sterling, to all the other brothers and sisters. Not that I want to say anything bad about anybody's dog, but our dog was definitely much more fit. People would say, "Oh, he has a taller build." And I'm like, "No, he's just the proper weight."

**KB:** Right.

**PY:** It's just amazing. There's no overweightness with the dog. He has a lot of energy. The smaller poo is definitely a blessing.

**KB:** It is. Small poo and less shedding. I'm assuming that he has been vitally healthy. You've not had allergy issues. Labs can have some inherent, breed-specific things. They tend to shed like a banshee. Probably Austin shed less than his peers at that one-year birthday party.

**PY:** Right.

**KB:** He has no allergies. I'm sure, right? He is allergy-free. That's awesome. People oftentimes they want to move to a homemade diet, but they're just intimidated. If you can offer some words of encouragement, what would be... When people say, "What do you feed your dog?" or "Oh my gosh, isn't it a lot of work?" what's your response to people that are thinking about doing a homemade raw food diet?

**PY:** I think following the recipe, it simplifies the entire process. There's no guesswork or whatsoever from portions to what vegetables and those types of things. I'd typically say just follow the recipe. Follow the book. Start small. You don't necessarily have to do the large batch on the first taking. Go ahead and do the smaller batch, and see how that goes for you. I mean, I'm lucky with the Lab, he eats absolutely everything. He's not finicky at all.

**KB:** Yes.

**PY:** Whether we're doing the chicken, the beef, or the turkey, he will just gobble it up.

**KB:** Sure.

**PY:** We're very lucky in that respect as well.

**KB:** Yeah, you are. He's open-minded. He'll eat whatever you put down for him, which is wonderful.

**PY:** Right.

**KB:** When you first went from feeding your dog that had transitioned from kibble to raw food, did you or Andy have any apprehensions about the concept of raw? Were you nervous about feeding raw meat? Or did my video kind of pare it down enough that you felt comfortable?

**PY:** Yeah, we did. I think that there were certain things that we were questioning about, okay, salmonella. And there is something about, okay, great, after you feed the dog, clean the bowl, you know, those kinds of things. Our daughter was thinking about her younger kids.

**KB:** Yup.

**PY:** Or if she was going to get pregnant again. Are there concerns? Because she's also with our pet food consortium. We've looked at that a little bit. But other than that, we weren't too concerned. There's a lot of raw diet dialogue out there right now. Some of them aren't as balanced as I think your diet is. I think that's what made it so logical to us to move to your diet and to your recipes because it just made so much more sense than to throw a couple of bones, meaty bones to a dog, and a carrot. It just seemed a little odd.

**KB:** Yeah. Well, I tell you, your video was wonderful. I appreciate you making it and sharing it with me. Viewers, you will love it. Click at the link of the bottom of this article to watch Pol's video on how he makes his homemade raw food diet. Thank you, Pol, for joining me.

**PY:** You're welcome. I'm glad to be here.

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