

All Fed Up

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July 25, 2013

The  Moscow Times

Кормить: to feed, to be fed upon

Every evening across all of Russia, millions of women's voices are raised in one lament: Чем сегодня кормить семью? (What am I going to make my family for dinner?)

OK, that's a bit of an exaggeration, but in my dacha community most of the moms seem to stand in front of the open refrigerator and mutter that question almost every night.

Кормить (to feed) is the general term for providing sustenance to children, pets and other living creatures. At my particular dacha, кормить is largely used to describe tipping some kibble into a dish for my dog. Чем ты кормишь собаку? (What do you feed your dog?) The choices are: сухой корм (dry kibble), консервы (canned dog food) or the slangy натуралка (people food; literally "natural food").

Across the street, for one mom the question of what to feed her child is easy. Она ещё кормит его (She's still nursing him). Sometimes for clarification, people say кормить грудью (to breast feed).

At the other end of the street, кормить has another meaning. An elderly neighbor had a stroke, so кормить means to spoon feed. But there's good news: Пока сиделка её ещё кормит, но сила в правой руке уже возвращается (Right now the caretaker still has to feed her, but strength is already coming back to her right hand).

And in another very hospitable dacha, guests slangily use кормить to describe the quality of food in general. Тут отлично кормят! (The food here is great!)

Кормёжка can mean feeding time, a feeding ground for wild animals or food itself. Тигр видел людей два раза в день при кормёжке (The tiger saw people twice a day at feeding time). Кормёжка в санатории вкусная (The grub is good at the sanatorium).

Кормушка (feeding trough, feeder) is the container that holds food for animals. Птицы и белки у кормушек быстро привыкают к людям (At the feeder, birds and squirrels quickly get used to people).

But you can feed people more than food. Дед гостей своими баснями кормит (My grandfather treats our guests to his stories). Фирма кормила нас обещаниями (The company strung us along with promises). But pay attention. Кормить завтраком (to make someone breakfast) is what you do for the family in the morning. Кормить "завтраками" (literally "to feed breakfasts") is a play on the word завтра (tomorrow) and means to be all talk and no action. Mañana, dude.

Кормить can also be used in the general sense of supporting someone — providing sustenance or a living. Рыбаков море ещё кормит (The sea still provides a living for the fishermen). Она кормила всю свою большую семью (She put food on the table for her large family).

Sometimes кормить doesn't mean to feed, but to be fed upon. Сын кормит комаров (literally "my son feeds the mosquitoes") means that the mosquitoes are eating the kid alive.

With bureaucrats, regions of the country, house management companies and other nefarious people and organizations, хватит кормить их (literally "stop feeding them") means: stop letting those guys suck us dry. Their кормушка (feeding trough) is any access to state or citizens' money. Вступительные экзамены в вуз стали хорошей кормушкой для профессоров (University entrance exams have become a gravy train for professors).

Sadly, unlike birds and squirrels, being the feeder doesn't seem to tame bureaucrats.

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/07/25/all-fed-up-a26160>