

Avian Nutrition

Nutritional Requirements

Commercial diets: A high quality formulated/commercial food pellet should make up most of the daily diet

- Pelleted diets are formulated to be nutritionally complete with all the necessary vitamins and minerals your bird needs
- Our brand recommendations include: *Lafeber, Harrison's Bird Foods, Roudybush, and Zupreme*
- Avoid pelleted food with added dyes if possible

Your bird's diet should consist of:

- 70% pellets
- 20% fresh vegetables
- 10% fruits, grains, seeds

Fresh vegetables: Vegetables add variety to the diet and can provide mental stimulation; they should make up about 20% of the daily diet

- Recommended vegetables: yellow and orange vegetables, dark leafy greens

Fruits, seeds, grains, nuts: These items should be fed in moderation, making up no more than 10% of the daily diet. Options include:

- Whole grain products such as bread, toast, unsweetened cereal, pasta, wheat germ, wild rice
- Tree nuts (such as almonds, walnuts, pecans) and palm nuts
- Nutrient dense fruits, such as berries, mango, and papaya
- A quality seed mix

Specific Dietary Needs and Requirements

Birds have increased energy needs during molt, growth, and egg laying. Egg laying is associated with higher demand for protein and calcium. Molt and growth require higher levels of protein in the diet.

What's wrong with seed diets?

Commercial seed mixes are deficient in several essential vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin A, D₃, E, and K, certain amino acids, calcium, and other minerals. These seed mixes are often high in fats and oils and low in protein as well. This dietary imbalance can eventually lead to nutritional deficiencies, obesity, and illness.

Additional considerations

- Provide fresh water at all times
- Remove old food and replace daily
- Wash all produce thoroughly
- Do not add salt, sugar, or fats (butter, margarine, oils) to any cooked or prepared foods
- Vitamin and mineral supplements are not necessary when feeding a balanced diet unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian

Dietary Conversion Tips

1. Any changes in the diet should happen slowly. Gradually increase the proportion of the new diet offered.
 - a. Monitor weight and droppings closely during the transition. Discontinue the dietary conversion and contact your veterinarian if you see a drop in weight or defecation.
2. Provide a variety of food colors, shapes, and textures for produce. You can also offer a variety of formulated food brands.
3. Prepare the food in different ways to offer your bird (raw, cooked, mashed, diced, sliced, etc.)
4. Parrots enjoy drama. Get excited about the new food items you are offering your bird. You can also enthusiastically eat a bite of the food (or pretend to) in front of your bird, then immediately offer him/her a bite.
 - a. You could also have another person feed you in front of your bird, then offer food to your bird
5. Ground feeding birds (cockatiels, budgerigars, etc) like to eat on flat surfaces. Sprinkle a formulated diet or pellets onto a table mixed with seed. For further enticement you can start pecking at the food like a bird using your thumb and forefinger.
6. Most parrots eat the most in the morning. This is a good time to offer new foods. If your bird does not eat the new diet by the afternoon, the old diet can be offered. This should be done for several days in a row.

Avian behavior and feeding

Wild parrots exhibit 4 main behaviors: socializing, preening/grooming, foraging, and sleeping. Most of a parrot's day is spent searching for food (foraging).

Our pet birds still have the instinct and desire to exhibit these natural foraging behaviors. When food is made readily available their natural foraging process is cut short. Birds will search for other activities to fill their day, such as over preening, which can lead to feather destructive behavior.

Captive Foraging

Foraging is a learned behavior that we must encourage and train in our companion parrots. Start the process slowly with easy to find food items, then gradually increase the complexity of your foraging methods. Your bird may need to watch you hide the food items at first to simulate curiosity.

- *Multiple food stations* – provide several bowls at various levels in the cage with different foods in each dish.
 - You can also weave food items through cage bars or wedge pieces between bar spaces
- *Conceal food items*
 - Start by partially covering food bowls with paper or cardboard and gradually making it more difficult to remove the cover and obtain the food
 - Hide food in items such as paper cups, corn husks, paper rolls, PVC piping, and wooden tubes
 - Food can be wrapped in large lettuce leaves or coffee filters/tissue paper
- Commercial puzzle toys and foraging trees are also available for use to encourage foraging behavior

Adapted from *Lafeber Foraging Behavior in Companion Parrots*, *Lafeber Feeding your Pet Bird a Healthy Diet*, and *Lafeber Converting your Bird to a Healthy Diet*