



WORLD PARROT TRUST

PARROT NUTRITION

KEEPING YOUR FEATHERED
COMPANION HEALTHY



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Diet & Nutrition

Find the Best Balance for Your Bird

Out of the 400-plus species of parrot in the world, some 200 have been seen in captivity over the last few decades. Each group of parrots – conures, macaws, parakeets, and so on – has its own special requirements when it comes to diet and health. One of the secrets to preventing many health issues in parrots is healthy and balanced nutrition, and it's not difficult to provide it.

In your search for nutritious foods for your parrot, you'll need to start with the big picture: how much energy does a companion bird need versus a wild one? In the wild, parrots expend a great deal of energy flying to and from foraging and nesting areas. In captivity, the energy expenditure is considerably less – by 10 to 15 times!

Feeding amounts vary by species, but trying different foods, measuring amounts, seeing how much your bird eats, and keeping an eye on its weight are good parameters to start with. In addition, most commercially available food will also have guidelines for different sizes/groups of birds. You can learn more about each species in the World Parrot Trust's **Parrot Encyclopedia**.

We cannot replicate a wild diet, nor should we try to -- for the most part, it is not possible to obtain the same foods. What we can and should do is use wild diets as a guide to feed companion or aviary parrots, and the key element in natural food is **variety**. Wild parrots forage on a bewildering array of foods, depending on the season and availability.



Think Diversity!

Give Your Parrot a Fresh Daily Variety



Vegetables

Start by providing your parrot with a healthy mix of particularly nourishing vegetables such as carrots, sweet and hot peppers, dark leaf vegetables (kale, dandelion, chard), peas, string beans, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes. Then move on to zucchini, tomatoes, fennel, corn, okra, and so forth.

Fruit

Parrots enjoy a rich assortment of fruits such as banana, melon, apple (without pips), papaya, passion fruit, pineapple, berries, kiwi, cherries, apricots and peaches (without pits), and other local varieties.

If collecting wild fruits and berries, make sure you know which species they are, and if they are edible.

Fresh seeds from papaya, melon, bell peppers, and pomegranate can also be provided as both food and enrichment for your parrot.



Grasses, Grains & Proteins

Harvesting naturally growing grasses just as they are going to seed can be a particularly nice treat for smaller parrots such as budgerigars and cockatiels, who would normally have this as a large part of their diet in the wild. Just be sure your harvested grasses are well cleaned and free from contaminants, like pesticide sprays and wild animal droppings.

Beans, chick peas and lentils are good sources of protein and best provided cooked. They work well in a mix of cooked grains, such as wheat, spelt, quinoa or millet. Both the cooked beans and grains can be frozen and divided into daily portions. Beans can also be sprouted, parboiled, and served once cool. Seeds and grains can be sprouted as well, and are far more nutritious that way.



Dry Foods

A parrot's need to chew is also important to take into consideration. In their natural surroundings, parrots will gnaw on and eat seeds, bark, flowers full of nectar and pollen, and other items. Dry foods and bird-safe branches can be included in your parrot's diet to help facilitate this. For example, nuts (especially in the shell) are healthy and very much appreciated by parrots. However, because they are high in fats, they should be provided in small quantities. Also, ensure nuts are fresh and not rancid or mouldy. Peanuts should be avoided as they can harbour *Aspergillus* sp. fungus, which can be deadly to your parrot.

Next, provide your parrot with a good quality seed mix (ie: free of dust and mould), that has a low percentage of sunflower seeds. Millet sprays are an interesting and relatively low-fat food and foraging item. Unbuttered, unsalted, air-popped popcorn can be a treat. And, if available, good quality parrot pellets can be beneficial – most commercial brands are nearly nutritionally complete.



Cleanliness & Presentation

Encourage a Healthy Appetite

All foods should be cleaned thoroughly (especially produce) and dishes changed daily, discarding any unused portions. Clean water should be provided every day, both for drinking and bathing. Water receptacles should also be changed daily as well.

Like fine dining in a restaurant, presentation can be everything: food a parrot may not like one way can turn into a favourite another way. Patience and perseverance are key. Engage your parrot by hanging foods or leaves on their cage wire or placing food on top of the cage. Foraging toys is another approach. This can be especially useful when you are introducing new foods. Some birds have seasonal preferences as well, so an item that may not be consumed in the spring may be eaten in the winter.



Species-Specific Requirements

Important Needs to Note

For all parrots, there are vitamin mineral supplements available which can be useful in moderation. However, nothing can top a varied, well balanced diet – but there are a few species with specific needs:

Macaws require a diet with a higher fat content – the addition of nuts, such as Brazil nuts or walnuts, should help.



Lories and lorikeets should mostly eat fruits, vegetables, pollen, and specific commercial or homemade nectars. Seeds are not the main part of their diet in the wild and should be provided sparingly.



Amazons and some small cockatoos, such as Galahs, can be prone to obesity, so be extra careful with regard to the fat content of their diet in relation to the amount of energy they expend.



Australian Grass Parakeets, cockatiels & many cockatoo species spend most of their day foraging on the ground for seeds. These birds may benefit from several smaller feeds to encourage activity throughout the day.



In general, it is important to research your specific parrot species' behaviour in the wild. Learn more in our **Parrot Encyclopedia**.

Foods to Avoid

High calorie foods should be limited as they can cause companion parrots to become overweight and develop serious health issues, such as fatty liver disease. Avocado, rhubarb, onions, garlic, mushrooms, asparagus, eggplant, chocolate, sugar, salt, and fatty rich foods or excessive amounts of any one particular food are also not good for parrots. Information may vary on what is safe to feed and what is not. When in doubt about the safety of a particular food, consult with your avian vet.

Dairy products, while not toxic per se, are fattening and should only be offered on a very limited basis. Alcohol and sugary drinks should be avoided altogether.

Learn more in our **Common Household Poisons Reference List**.



Additional Resources

In sum, a variety of healthy and clean foods will help to enrich and possibly lengthen your bird's life. While we can't always replicate the great outdoors, we can find other solutions to get us there as closely as possible, for all of our companion birds.

For more information:

Wild Diets, Captive Options (J. Gilardi, EB Cravens)

Sprouting for Parrots (Jamie Gilardi)

Clarity on Nutritional Issues (Ask an Expert/Glenn Reynolds)

Podcast with EB Cravens (Charlie Moores)



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