

First Parrotlet Owner Questions

I've never owned parrotlets before, can you help me?

Q: I'm getting two baby parrotlets this weekend (brother and sister) from a friend of mine. They hatched about a month and a half ago and were both hand-fed from the get-go. They're very cute. I just wanted to see if you have any advice for me as I've never owned birds before. Vet trips? Wing-feather trims? Will they try to mate? What sorts of things go into their cage? Should I give them a nest to sleep in? Thank you.

Sandee Molenda explains:

Since these parrotlets are related, they should never be bred and, therefore, I strongly recommend you keep them in separate cages. That is the only way to ensure that the parrotlets will not breed. Also, most parrotlets are very territorial and aggressive when it comes to their cages, and one will usually become dominant over the other and may pick on the other bird. "Share" is usually not a word in the parrotlet vocabulary, and the dominant parrotlet will often keep the other bird from eating, perching and playing. Parrotlets can have time together outside of their cages on playpens, but they should always be supervised.

I believe most people recommend that birds have a vet check once a year and that would be the same for parrotlets. Your birds will go through their first molt at 4 to 6 months of age and will need their wings feathers trimmed after the molt is completed. They will probably molt again at 1 year of age and will need to be trimmed after every molt, which can be one or two times a year.

Parrotlets are very playful and enjoy a wide variety of toys including hanging and swinging toys. Parrotlets should also have a variety of perches, although natural wood perches that have not been sprayed with chemicals or pesticides are the best. This will allow their feet to get exercise by standing on different diameters of the cage. Some people like to provide Happy Huts™ or Pet Tents™ to young parrotlets to help them feel secure and keep them warmer. However, they can increase unwanted parrotlet hormonal behavior such as aggression, feather picking, masturbation and egg laying.

I also recommend that the parrotlets' daylight hours be limited to no more than 12, and that they be covered at night. This will, again, reduce unwanted hormonal urges and help ensure that the parrotlet parrots are receiving enough rest.

Feed your parrotlets daily a diet rich in fresh foods, such as fruit, vegetables, greens, sprouted seeds, cooked grains and legumes, millet, whole-grain breads and a quality seed mix. Vitamins are generally not needed if the parrotlets are eating an otherwise healthy diet. Mineral block, cuttlebone and fresh, clean water should always be available.