

Pet Bird Diet Components - Page 2

An in-depth look at the components of a healthy pet bird diet

By Nikki Moustaki

Pet Bird Diet Component – Cooked Diets

Most birds enjoy today's cooked commercial diets, which consist mainly of grains, legumes, dehydrated vegetables and vitamins. You can make a similar mix yourself, but the commercial versions are quick and easy to use. Some people use cooked diets as the base diet, and offer pellets and seeds "on the side," along with fruits and vegetables.

"Many of the grains in seed, such as wheat, millet, barley and oats, simply aren't eaten by birds because they are too hard, so cooking these grains makes them very appealing to birds," said Peterson. "Companion birds find cooked diets to be psychologically satisfying too, and many get excited at feeding time."

Pet Bird Diet Component – Treats

Healthy commercial treats make convenient snacks for your bird, or, if you have extra time, make your own "birdie bread" (usually corn bread mix with some healthy goodies tossed in). Seed sticks and treats are OK as the occasional snack, but aren't appropriate for everyday consumption. Small birds usually enjoy millet spray, and though it's not chock full of nutrients, it's OK to offer a couple of times a week if you're feeding other nutritious foods.

Pet Bird Diet Component – Water

"Water is an often overlooked nutrient, but it's the most important nutrient in a diet," said Greg Burkett, DVM, ABVP, owner of The Birdie Boutique in Durham, North Carolina. "Birds need clean, fresh water at all times."

Change your bird's water at least twice a day. Use bottled water if possible but not distilled water. Burkett recommends trying out a water bottle with your bird, because bacteria can't grow as readily inside the bottle. Some bird keepers recommend using a drop or two of grapefruit seed extract or apple cider vinegar in the water to retard bacteria growth.

Pet Bird Species-Specific Diets

Lately, the trend in avian diets is toward bird species-specific diets. Bird food labels have always indicated species, but that has mainly been to match the size of the food to the size of the bird.

"There are myths floating around such as 'macaws need more fat,' 'greys need more calcium,' and 'Eclectus need more vitamin A,' but none of these rumors have been substantiated," said Burkett. "The vitamin-A and calcium deficiencies in these particular species can be corrected by feeding a formulated diet. And macaws get fat when fed extra fat in their diet, leading to fatty liver disease, fatty tumors arteriosclerosis and other health problems. It may be found in the future that there are specific requirements for different species, but that work has not been done yet, and in the meantime, all of the birds that I have raised do very well on the formulated diets that are available now."

Putting It All Together

If you ask 100 bird experts about the proper bird diet, you're going to get 100 answers. Most experts, however, agree that variety is essential. For birds, balance in the diet is all about variety. The more variety you can offer, the more possibilities that your bird will get the nutrients it needs.

So, it makes sense to feed the most nutritious foods when the bird is hungriest, in the morning, and then feed the base diet in the late afternoon with a little bit of seed tossed in just before bedtime. This gives your bird what it needs when it's most likely to eat it.

If you put a bowl of seeds alongside a bowl of veggies, the seed will win your bird's attention. But if you present a cooked diet and some fresh foods in the morning, pellets in the afternoon, and then a small amount of seeds in the evening, your bird will have no choice but to eat what's offered.

Introduce Healthy Foods

Try these tricks to get your bird to try nutritious foods. [More>>>](#)

Here's a basic breakdown of balance buzzwords: Protein – The building block of muscle. Lack of protein can cause feather and skin issues and lowered immunity. Good protein sources for birds include hard-boiled eggs (boiled more than 40 minutes), well-cooked poultry and fish, cooked beans (never raw) and small amounts of cheese and yogurt (but not milk or ice cream). Nuts are also a good source of protein but not a complete source. Carbohydrates – Carbs create energy, so a lack of them leads to fatigue and decreased immune function. For birds, carbs are typically found in seeds, cereals,

starchy vegetables and fruits.

Fats – Fat is an essential part of the avian diet. Fats help with vitamin absorption, lubricate the skin and feathers, and contributes to overall health. Find appropriate fats for birds in nuts, seeds, and in oils added to the diet, such as flax seed or fish oils. Vitamins – Like people, birds also need their vitamins. In general, birds tend to suffer from a deficiency of vitamin A. You'll find this vitamin in carrots, jalapeno peppers, kale, red peppers, spinach, butternut squash and mango, among other items.

Vitamin D3 is also a common deficiency, but it can be helped by exposure to sunlight or full-spectrum lamps. The jury is still out on whether or not birds should be supplemented with vitamins in the water. One camp says that it's necessary and the other warns about making the water a breeding ground for bacteria. Minerals – Minerals allow multiple bodily systems to function properly, from the musculoskeletal system to the respiratory system to the digestive system. Many captive birds suffer from a calcium deficiency, which can be diagnosed by your veterinarian. Leafy greens (turnip, beet, mustard chard, and watercress), cheese, almonds, broccoli and yams are all high in calcium.

Feeding your pet bird right isn't as difficult as you think, but it certainly takes a little time and effort. But your bird is worth the extra effort. Don't over think the diet – just try to give your bird as many nutritious foods as you can each day, and let it sort through them.