

Get Your Dream Bird Cage

Use these tips to save money and buy the perfect bird cage for your pet birds.

By Susan Chamberlain

Do your research when you plan on getting a new cage for your bird. Courtesy Erin Guirrios, California

Do you realize that the cost of a \$600 cage amortized over 30 months is just \$20 a month? A bird cage can be a big investment, depending on size, workmanship and materials. It's the most substantial piece of avian real estate you'll ever purchase for your bird.

I've always advised readers to opt for the largest bird cage they can afford and accommodate in their homes, but it isn't just about size; it's about quality, safety and getting the best value for your money.

Just like a house or apartment, the bird cage must be large enough to accommodate the occupants, practical enough to suit the birds and human caretakers, and modern enough to clean and service efficiently. If there's a new cage in your bird's future, now is the time to budget for it.

Some simple math and planning is all it takes to finally get that dream cage. "Estimate how much the new cage will cost, and then figure out what percentage that is of your annual after-tax income," said accountant Bob Dietrich of Sayville, New York. "Deduct that percentage from your paycheck each week until you have the money for the cage. If you want it sooner, increase the weekly deduction."

Dietrich, who shares his home with seven pet birds, suggested putting that reserve in a special account. "Open a special account just for bird stuff. Put a set percentage of your paycheck in there each week and keep adding to it."

"How soon do you need the cage? If you anticipate the need a year or two down the road, opening a CD might be a good option because you'll make some money on your deposits," advised Dietrich. "Even a 6-month CD pays more than a standard savings account. You have to plan ahead."

Dietrich cautioned that a "sale" cage might end up costing you more if you fall into the credit card trap. "If you pay it off within a few months, it may be worthwhile, but in the long run, it's more expensive when you're paying interest every month."

With tax season looming, it might be tempting to take advantage of instant tax refunds, but Dietrich warned against these. "I don't recommend it, because the tax preparer is going to make money on it somewhere and you're going to pay. If you're in a hurry, file early and have the IRS direct deposit your refund to your bank account."

"Some bird stores will accept layaway payments if space permits," said Dietrich. "With layaway, you pay a certain amount each week until the item is paid for. You don't take it home until it's paid in full."

"You might get a better deal if you take a display item. Retailers need to make room for new items. The floor model might have a few scratches, but your bird won't care!"

Day-to-day frugality can pay off quickly. Dietrich recommended curtailing some expensive habits to make that new cage a reality much sooner. "Don't buy coffee or snacks at the gas station every time you fill up. Reduce the number of lottery tickets you buy each week. Stop smoking. It's an expensive habit, and it adversely affects your health and your bird's. Cut down on restaurant and fast-food meals. Bring your lunch to work instead of going out or ordering in."

Make The Best Choice

How much should you pay for a bird cage? Prices range from about \$50 for a roomy budgie cage up into the thousands for top-of-the-line avian furniture.

Check the prices of the models that draw your interest. After you narrow your selections to cages that most closely fit your budget, ask your fellow bird owners and bird club members if they own any of your top choices. Discuss practicality and problems. What do they find most useful about the cage? What is the cage lacking? Do they have other recommendations? Don't be afraid to start your search over. This is an investment, so you want to make the best choice.

Call manufacturers to locate local retailers so you can see the bird cages firsthand. Test the cage out. Are there any sharp edges? Does the tray come out easily? Do the feeders have outside access for a bird sitter? Does it have wheels and will those hold up? Is the cage taller than you, and will that pose a problem with your bird? Inquire at your local avian store about upcoming sales or coupons. Keep your eyes open for local newspaper and television ads, especially for new pet shops. Grand openings often mean great prices.

Don't overlook mail order sources. Peruse the ads in BIRD TALK for mail order retailers that might offer cages that are difficult to find in your area.

Finally, don't be afraid to ask for a discount from wherever you buy your cage. There's no guarantee that you'll get one, but you might get the buy of a lifetime!

Tip: Buy a cage at a bird club event and you might save. Vendors often don't want to haul their leftovers back to the stock room, so they'll offer rock-bottom rates.

Questions To Ask Before Buying A Bird Cage.

- 1) Are replacement parts available for the bird cage? Touch-up paint for the bird cage?
- 2) How was the bird cage constructed? Welds? Stainless steel?
- 3) Is there a warranty for the bird cage?
- 4) Will it be easy to assemble the bird cage? Move?

7 Reasons To Buy A Bird Cage Now

How do you know when it's time to purchase a new bird cage? Try this checklist.

- 1) Your bird needs more room in its bird cage for its active lifestyle.
- 2) You've moved, or changed the furniture around, and now have space for the big bird cage you've always wanted.
- 3) Rust, discoloration or chipped paint appears on the bird cage.
- 4) Welded parts are breaking on the bird cage on a regular basis.
- 5) Not enough room to hang all those bird toys in the bird cage.
- 6) Existing bird cage is beautiful but impractical and difficult to clean or inconvenient.
- 7) Old bird cages lack modern additions, such as extra feeders and seed guards.