

## Easy Ways To A Clean Bird Cage

**Clean around your pet bird's cage in a snap with these simple tips.**

*By Deborah Broocker*

Parrots are wonderful and entertaining companions. However, they have a tendency to create a significant mess in and around their bird cages from spent food and bird droppings. Responsibility for a healthy, happy bird requires good housekeeping in addition to playtime and emotional bonding. Of course, anyone would rather spend quality time with his or her birds than on cleanups. Yet, there are plenty of quick and easy bird cage cleaning strategies.

When my husband and I became "empty nesters" (no pun intended!), we decided to adopt a baby African grey, which we named Pepper. As excited as I was anticipating the arrival of our new bird, I secretly dreaded the extra cleaning time we would be spending to keep our home sparkling.

According to Jane Gesser, bird breeder and co-owner of Critters Closet in Georgia, a parrot's role in the wild is to disperse seeds from fruits and nuts, both in droppings and in unused portions of food that fall to the ground. Parrots and many other species of birds are nature's feathered farmers. They help the environment by dropping seeds that germinate and grow.

Unfortunately, pet birds don't discriminate between our homes and the jungle floor of their native habitat. Owners must take responsibility for cleanliness and hygiene in the home to create ecology of well-being for all who live there.

When Pepper was ready to come home, my husband refurbished an older bird cage to be Pepper's play area. We also purchased a roomy cage for his main residence and sleeping spot. It didn't take us long to observe that our new bird created the predicted mess in the vicinity of both bird cages.

After a few weeks of trying different cleaning methods, I developed a simple system that minimizes the time and work necessary to keep Pepper's areas, especially around the bird cage, as neat as possible. First, I purchased several easily obtainable and inexpensive items for a total cost of roughly \$100.

According to Stewart Colby, DVM, practitioner of exotic animal medicine in Alpharetta, Georgia, cleanliness may be one of the single best ways to keep your bird healthy. Bits of pet bird food and droppings can attract insects, which are often vectors for illnesses. It can also become a breeding ground for harmful pathogens. Transmission of psittacosis is associated with dried bird feces. Food that has been left out for too long can grow fungi, and dirty water can grow a variety of bacteria that can make a bird sick.

### Where Pet Bird Mess Comes From

The bulk of the mess in the bird cage area comes from food, although droppings and feather debris can be nuisances, too. A key part of my daily cleaning routine involves removing wet edibles from feeding cups and the cage bottom as soon as possible. Wet food attracts insects more quickly than dry foods. Dry nourishment consists of pellets, seeds or nuts, but in a humid environment even these dry bits will absorb moisture and begin to create some of the problems associated with the wet material.

We incorporate moist food items into special socializing time that coincides with our own dinnertime and breakfast. At breakfast, Pepper might get a portion of my oatmeal or banana. At dinnertime, I cut up fresh fruit and vegetables for him. Any uneaten portions of wet food are cleaned up immediately after each meal. Bird cage food cups are emptied and cleaned once a day, and unused dry bird food is thrown out, either wrapped in plastic bags or put down the garbage disposal.

### Get To The Bottom Of Things

We cover the bottoms of the bird cages with newspapers. With a little luck, you may find a paper that fits perfectly in the bottom tray. Use the non-colored portions of the paper, and never use glossy pages. You can also order a custom-made cage liner from any number of manufacturers. Liners should be changed daily, preferably in the morning or just before bedtime, especially if your bird has a penchant for foraging beneath the grate during the day. This will keep the cage free of molded bits of food and feces, and it's a quick and easy way to clean up the daily bird mess.

Newer bird cages have powder coating, which easily wipes clean with a damp paper towel or with soap and water. Many

cages also have metal skirts that attach near the base and fan out to catch debris that flies out from between the bars.

Clear Plexiglas sheets attached to the side of the cage serve as a barrier to bits of food and water that Pepper might fling onto the walls. Purchase them at a hardware store and cut to fit the dimensions of the sides of the cage, or choose a custom cage protector from a bird product manufacturer.

I secure each plastic sheet by using a single metal S-hook made of stainless steel that Pepper could not possibly chew through or hurt himself on. The hook slips over the horizontal bar that runs above the level of the feeding cup and the top of the Plexiglas sheet to secure it. The bottom of the Plexiglas piece rests snugly against the metal skirt that is attached along the base of the cage.

Fortunately, my bird has not shown any curiosity with either the Plexiglas or the metal hooks that hold them in place. C-clamps could be another way to hold the plastic in place, and spring clamps might also work well. Whatever hardware items you decide to use, make certain they are made of nontoxic material, such as stainless steel. Also, avoid exposing your pet bird to any harmful substance that could be bitten off and cause choking.

#### Floor It

I knew immediately that something needed to be placed underneath the bird cages to protect our carpets – and it needed to be easy to clean. A nonporous surface would be ideal to wash, sweep or vacuum the dirt off. Hardware stores sell clear vinyl carpet protectors that come in thicknesses ranging from “low pile” to “heavy duty” carpet runners. The bottom is covered with small plastic grippers that gently dig into the carpet, resulting in a stable surface, which is easily swept or wiped clean. You might also try a plastic chair mat from an office supply store or a custom-made one from a bird-specialty manufacturer.

Once a week, I roll the cage off the mats and take them outside to quickly hose off any sticky food or droppings. The mats can be hung over a rail, and they dry in a matter of minutes.

No matter what you do, there will still be shells, hulls and bits of food that end up on the floor near your bird's cage. I discovered that the easiest way to clean this dry material off the floor is with a mechanical brush sweeper. This handy device shouldn't frighten your bird the way a vacuum might, and it discreetly stores in a corner near the cage for easy access.

A hand-held, battery-operated vacuum might be another choice for your cage area cleaning strategy, and a steam cleaner can do wonders to remove dried on bits of food and feces on the actual cage.

Birds cannot be expected to clean up after themselves. Simplify your daily cleaning chores by creating manageable routines based on some preventive measures and basic cleanup habits. The payoff is that you are ensuring a healthy bird along with a clean and healthy household.