

Simplify Your Avian Spending

Some budget ideas for the bird owner concerned about their spending.

By Susan Chamberlain

Food, grooming, cleaning products and accessories are ongoing expenses for people who share their homes with pet birds. Try these four simple, cost-conscious tips to keep your bird budget healthy.

1. Hire A Professional or Do It Yourself?

Here are four ways to keep control of your birdie budget.

Note: Do not attempt to groom your bird until you are properly trained by an avian veterinarian or experienced groomer and are confident of your skills.

Grooming fees can add up, especially if you have multiple birds. Prices differ according to the size of the bird, your zip code, demand and the venue in which you have your bird groomed.

House calls from professional groomers vary in price and region. In my area, grooming fees start at \$40. (Don't be afraid to ask for references.) Ask about discounts for multiple birds and if wing-feather trimming and nail clipping are charged separately or packaged together.

Bird stores often offer grooming services, and the cost is typically lower than a house call. Ask friends for recommendations to ensure a good experience. Ask if prices are a la carte or all-inclusive. If you purchased your bird from the store, it might do its grooming for free or at a discount.

Bird owners often opt to groom their birds themselves. You'll need to purchase trimming clippers and styptic powder, but you'll save money in the long-term. Add a concrete blend or sandy perch to your bird's cage to help blunt its nails. Mist/bathe your bird to keep its feathers healthy between molts.

2. Throw It Away or Salvage It?

Toys, perches, playgyms and cages are necessary avian accouterments, but they don't have to blast your budget. Although normal wear and tear is unavoidable, there are ways to prolong the life of a toy or accessory: Be diligent about upkeep. Sand down or scrape freshly cleaned wood perches to keep them looking like new. Keep cage bars clean and dry to prevent corrosion. Rotate toys to sustain your bird's interest. Select toys made from durable materials, such as hard wood and plastic, and those with handy replaceable parts. Trim the loose strings on rope toys to give them new life and to prevent your bird from getting caught in them. (Inspect your bird's toys and cage accessories regularly for wear and tear, and replace any that pose a hazard.)

3. Easy Household Solutions

Use white vinegar for cleaning. A gallon from the supermarket costs just a few dollars. For general cleaning, use 14 cup of vinegar to a quart of water for cleaning windows, and 12 cup of vinegar to a gallon of water for tile or vinyl floors. You can also use a vinegar solution to: Spot clean bird debris off windows, cage aprons and other hard surfaces. Wipe down your oven after each use. Spray on houseplant soil once a month to inhibit mold growth.

(Be aware that vinegar is a mild acid that can leach color from low-end vinyl flooring. Do not use it on marble because it will eventually etch the surface.)

Use plain rubbing alcohol to sanitize Formica® and other laminate surfaces. It dries almost immediately and is nearly fume-free. A quart costs about \$1.29. Avoid harsh chemicals — use baking soda instead of scouring powder.

4. Small Steps, Big Payoff

Never pay full price —

Watch for special sales and promotions. Purchase replacement parts for cages and stands when you buy the original

product because they might not be available later on when you need them. Do your research before purchasing more expensive items and look into online discounts or outlet and clearance centers. Take advantage of sales and special offers at bird fairs, which often have show specials. Buy in bulk when possible. Some shops and mail-order companies offer discounts when you purchase several of the same products. When purchasing cleaning products, buy large sizes; and refill spray bottles as needed. Use a low- or no-interest credit card for major purchases, such as a cage, and pay it off while the special rate is still in effect. Open an interest-bearing account just for bird-related purchases. When you've built up a substantial sum, transfer the money into a short-term CD for better earnings.

Even saving away spare change can pay off. Many bank and credit unions will sort your change without charging a fee. Creative thinking and smarter saving can benefit both you and your bird.