

Grow A Play Tree For Your Pet Bird

A tree will encourage your parrot to play and forage.

By Shari Beaudoin

Grow a play tree! Certain species of trees can be used safely, especially if they are thoroughly dried, have all leaves removed and have smooth, or no bark on them. If any tree branch is collected outdoors, it has to be from a known non-toxic plant species and has not been sprayed with any chemicals, including insecticides or fertilizers. Tree species that are considered safe are: ash, bamboo, beech, birch, crabapple, dogwood, grapevine, ironwood, magnolia or willow. All of these should have the leaves removed (as some can contain mild toxins) and be thoroughly dried before use.

The base should be large enough to contain any mess that might fall from the spread branches above. Our Amazon parrot's trees have bases that are about 30 inches wide by 40 inches long, which is large enough to catch almost all of the falling debris and yet allows us to roll them through an average-size doorway to move them from room to room.

After the tree is mounted to an appropriate base (we use several 5-inch-long lag screws with washers that are screwed up through the underside of the base and into the tree bottom), we then attach four to five forked branches to the upright branches of the tree to give several horizontal levels to play on. These forked branches are chosen with varying diameters from approximately a half inch in diameter up to about a quarter inch in diameter.

The varying diameters are beneficial in keeping an Amazon's feet in good shape by helping to avoid sores that can occur on the bottom of the foot from repetitive pressure. Pressure sores are even more likely in a cage with only a few different shapes and thicknesses of perches.

When attaching the branches try to keep in mind how your Amazon(s) will be moving about the tree. It is also a good idea to place the branches so they are not directly above each other if possible. This lessens the need to clean bird waste off of the branches.

Any hardware used (wood screws or eye screws) building the tree should be stainless steel if possible. Wood screws are used to attach the perches and eye screws can be mounted at appropriate places on the tree for the solid attachment of lots of toys, bouncy ropes, plastic chain or any number of other fun things for your Amazon! You can drill holes of various sizes (usually from about a quarter inch up to three quarters of an inch in diameter) through the tree so as to have cavities in the play tree where you can wedge treats or toy parts. This is an excellent way to stimulate your Amazon parrot's natural foraging behavior.

The tree should be mounted on a sturdy base (attaching wheels makes these trees quite easy to move from one area to another) that is made with an easily cleaned material like melamine.

Any wood that is exposed (our tree bases have melamine bottoms and oak sides) should receive multiple coats of a child-safe varnish to protect and seal it against the moisture and abuse caused by the regular cleaning it will need – considering it will be underneath the bird for extended periods of time.