

New Pet Bird Setup & Products

Pet birds require some accessories and “furniture” of their own. Use these pet bird tips to find the best pet bird cage, playgyms, air filters, cleaning products and more for your pet bird.

By Susan Chamberlain

The Pet Bird Cage

Purchase an appropriately large pet bird cage. Your parrot should be able to spread and flap its wings without hitting the cage bars. If you have a small bird, such as a finch, canary or budgie, buy a cage that is wide enough for the birds to fly around inside. There should be enough space to accommodate extra dishes and perches, toys and other accessories. Bar spacing should be narrow enough to keep the pet bird from sticking its head through the rods. The cage must be sturdy enough for the pet bird to be housed inside, and door and feeder closures should be secure and inaccessible from inside the pet bird cage.

The cage design and color you choose depend on your personal preference and style. Avoid intricate or fussy designs that might trap your pet bird body parts or make the cage especially difficult to clean. Prior to buying a pet bird cage, measure your available floor space to see how much room you have. When purchasing a large welded or pre-assembled cage, measure your doorways to be sure the cage will make it through. Most large cages are sold disassembled, or “knocked down.” Put the cage together in the room where it is to be used. It may not fit through the doorway once assembled.

Invest in a cage with mess-containment features, such as hooded feeders or an angled cage tray apron. If your cage doesn't have mess management devices, you can purchase them separately. Cage skirts and mess catchers are available at pet shops and through mail-order pet supply companies.

Where To Put The Pet Bird Cage

Pet birds are social and enjoy interacting with family members. Place the pet bird cage where your pet can observe household activities without being in the middle of too much noise and confusion.

Locate the cage against a wall or near a corner of the room to give your pet a sense of security. Skylights, sliding glass doors and other large expanses of glass may unknowingly provide a scary view of circling hawks, prowling cats or other predators, so use a cover on part of the cage to provide a hiding place. A view of outdoors can provide stimulation and entertainment as long as the bird has a place to get away from it. Place the cage so your feathered friend can see outside but is not visible to passersby for safety and anti-theft reasons.

To birds, height means safety. The cage should be high enough from the floor that the bird will be out of reach of toddlers and household pets.

Parrot Playgym Or T-Stand

The playgym or stand is an out-of-the cage, often mobile, area for parrots to play and socialize with the family. The stand is a great place to work on training your pet bird, as it may be less territorial when away from its cage. It's also a convenient place to park your parrot when your attention is momentarily diverted elsewhere.

Stands and playgyms are available for birds ranging in size from parrotlet to macaw. They may be elaborate, incorporating swings, ladders, toys and feeders into the design, or as simple as a T-stand. Tabletop and freestanding styles are available. Where space is limited, opt for a cage-top model. Some bird cages have play areas built right into the tops.

Pet Bird Travel Cage

You'll need a travel cage or carrier to take your bird safely to the avian veterinarian, to the bird groomer, to visit friends, to go on vacation, or for emergency evacuation. Backpack style carriers are increasingly popular with bird owners because they are lightweight, hands-free, easy to store and often washable. For air travel, a hard-shelled, airline-approved carrier is required. Small, medium and large plastic crates, just like those used to transport cats and dogs, are in this category. The crate needs a wire grid door and ventilation panels. Birds can easily gain a beak-hold on carriers with plastic panels. Accustom your bird to its carrier well before you make a trip. Encourage the bird to snack and play inside and on top of its carrier so that it will be familiar with it prior to departure.

A Scale To Weigh Your Pet Bird

A gram scale is a great item to have for monitoring your bird's weight. Your avian veterinarian will be able to tell you the average weight for your bird's species. Weighing your pet periodically will help you monitor its general health. Weight gain or loss is often the first indication of a health problem in your pet bird.

Full-Spectrum Lighting For Pet Birds

Full-spectrum lighting is a great health aid. Because most pet birds are kept indoors, they do not get enough natural light. Some full-spectrum light is necessary in order for your bird to properly synthesize certain vitamins. Floor lamps, clip-on, wall-mounted and cage top lighting fixtures are available. You can even use screw-in spiral bulbs in existing light fixtures. Monitor the length of full-spectrum exposure carefully, because too many hours of such light may stimulate unwanted bird breeding behavior. Read package directions and manufacturers' recommendations prior to installing.

Pet Bird Air Filters

Birds generate a lot of dander and dust. Airborne pollutants inside your house may include pollen, mold, bacteria, cooking fumes and cigarette smoke. An electronic air filter will help remove some of these elements from the indoor atmosphere. High-efficiency furnace and air conditioning filters and allergen-reducing vacuum cleaner bags are also recommended. Be aware, however, that air filters cannot remove toxic fumes, such as those from nonstick cookware, from the air. During warm weather, install a window fan that blows air out. It will remove a considerable amount of particulate matter from your home. Alternatively, use high-efficiency filters in your air conditioners.

Bird Product Storage

Dedicate a closet, pantry shelf or kitchen cabinet specifically for bird food, dishes and accessories. Store food in see-through, bug-resistant canisters and, if convenient, in the original containers. When purchasing bird food in large (25-pound-plus) quantities, store it in a plastic trash can with a lid to reduce risk of moth or rodent infestation. Some cages and cage stands come with shelves or cabinets below for storage. These are handy for storing cage covers, tray paper, paper towels and other cumbersome items. Microwave carts make great utility stands for small cages, as they usually have several shelves underneath.

Bird Seed Moths

Use pheromone (sex lure) moth traps in your pantry and closets. Use the "flour moth" or "seed moth" variety. These odor-free, nontoxic lures are effective at stopping small moth problems before they become big problems. If you think you don't have moths, you may be surprised when you check the traps after a week or two.

Cleaning The Pet Bird Cage

Change cage tray paper, and wipe droppings and sticky food from cage bars at least once a day. Spray cage tray paper lightly with water before removing it to prevent dust and dander from flying into the air.

Use a perch scraper to quickly remove dried detritus from perches. Buy extra sets of dishes and perches so you can quickly replace the used ones with clean duplicates as needed. Wash your bird's dishes each day.

The area where you keep your pet bird demands almost as much attention as the cage itself. Flung foodstuff and errant feathers make for a fine mess. Make it easier on yourself by locating your pet bird's furniture on a hard surface, such as tile or vinyl flooring. Use easy-to-clean wallpaper, washable paint or clear acrylic panels on the walls surrounding your pet's cage. Keep an electric broom or hand-held vacuum nearby for quick cleanups.

Use nontoxic cleaning products, like white vinegar, soap or citrus cleaners in your bird's area. Never spray aerosol or pump spray products near your bird. Even though a product is deemed nontoxic it may be harmful if your bird inhales it.

Remember, most household chemicals are not routinely tested on pet birds, so there is no way to absolutely guarantee their safety. Stain-proofing products and fabric deodorizers may be particularly problematic. Read labels carefully, and always ventilate your bird's area well when you are using cleaning products. Rinse and dry cages and accessories thoroughly before using.