

Let's Go Bird Supply Shopping

There's great stuff out there for you and your pet bird

By Susan Anderson

Walking into a bird or pet store is great fun for bird owners. I recently checked out my local bird store and found that there is a lot of interesting stuff out there, for both you and your pet bird. Let's start with you — the bird owner — first and find things that will make your life easier.

Bird Cages

One of the most important purchases you will make for your bird is a bird cage. The bird cage is its home, or its room in your home. Birds are flock animals, so put the bird cage in a room where people hang out. Most pet birds feel secure if one side of the cage is against a wall rather than totally out in the open. Also avoid locating the bird cage directly in front of a window, leave at least part of it against a wall so your bird can "retreat" if startled by something outside.

Bird Cage Construction: Bird cages are made from many different materials and can be simple or elaborate. Cages can run the gamut from stainless steel to furniture-coordinating wood. Because parrots chew, the cage construction needs to be safe and sturdy. Lead-based paint on a bird cage is considered dangerous.

Size and scale: Your pet bird will spend a lot of time in its cage, so get the largest one you can afford. Bird cages should be wide, as opposed to tall, because pet birds move around the bird cage more horizontally than vertically. Be sure, however, that the bars aren't spaced too far apart. They should be close enough together so that the bird can't poke its head through and have trouble getting it back.

Food and water containers: Three is a good number — one for food, one for water and one for treats or fresh food. An extra set of dishes allows you to substitute out clean dishes for dirty ones.

Pull-out trays: Most bird cages are outfitted with these at the bottom to make disposal of spilled food and feces easier. Line these trays for easy removal. Many people use newspapers, paper towels, recycled paper litter products, corn cob or other kinds of litter designed specifically for birds. Unusual fecal matter is a sign of illness, so use litter that won't hide this. Change the litter or paper daily, and thoroughly clean the cage weekly.

Sleep cage: Some people keep a separate, more sparse cage for their bird to sleep in, which is kept in a quiet room. This is good if the bird is kept in a busy family room, where lights or a TV are kept on late. Birds should have 12 hours of uninterrupted sleep time, so if yours is a late-night household, consider offering your bird a separate sleep area.

Cleaning Stuff

Birds, while lovable, are messy and can't clean up after themselves — so the job falls on you. Here are some helpful items to make your cleaning job easier.

Mess catchers and cage aprons: Mess catchers are large plastic bins to place under your pet bird's cage. They can be picked up, emptied out and washed. Mess catchers are especially useful if your bird cages are on the carpet. Cage aprons attach to the cage and either come with the cage or can be ordered. Debris that falls just outside of the cage is caught in the apron, which is slanted toward the cage bottom, so the debris falls back inside the cage. Some aprons are made of metal and some of mesh material, which just surround the bottom of the cage and are held there by elastic.

Mats sold at office supply stores (for rolling office chairs) are also good to put one under your bird's cage. Anything is better than carpet.

Bird-Safe Cleansers: Your bird's respiratory system is very delicate. Strong cleaners can emit fumes that can make your bird very sick, and possibly kill it, so look for cleaning agents that don't have ammonia or bleach. Make sure they are nontoxic. Some bird-specific products include brush applicators that work well to remove poop and debris from hard surfaces.

Sometimes our birds' food, water or cage debris attracts little critters, like ants that wander into your house and find a

smorgasbord in and around bird cages. Camicide is a good insect spray that is safe to use around birds. If you offer seeds to your birds, keep moths at bay by storing seeds in air-tight containers.

Playgyms and T-stands give your bird a place to hang out when they are out of the cage, other than on you.

Bird Playgyms & T-Stands

Your birds need places to hang out when they are out of their cage, other than on you. Playgyms and T-stands usually have a couple of bowls attached for treats and water, as well as some swinging toys. Most birds enjoy them, and get some extra exercise walking up and down the branches. Playgyms on wheels allow you to roll them around the home.

If you have multiple birds, you may want more than one. Unless your birds get along very well with each other, they may not want to share, which can lead to injury. The alternative is to take one bird out at a time, and give each of them some time on the playgym.

You can also buy some smaller stands to carry from room to room — for example, when your bird wants to hang out with you in your bedroom while you are folding laundry.

Bird Travel Carriers

You need a travel carrier for each pet bird you own, in case of emergencies and for routine grooming and vet appointments. Bird travel carriers can be made of metal, plastic, cloth or Plexiglas. Some are designed to fit under airplane seats. You never know when you are going to need to take your pet bird to the avian vet, and need something to transport the bird in.

Bird Perches

Bird cages usually come with a couple of dowels, or perhaps manzanita wood perches. You will need to add or replace one or two of them. Your bird is on its feet all day and needs a variety of surfaces to stand on. Your pet bird should have at least three perches of varying diameter, shape and material.

Some perches are made of concrete, and will keep your bird's nails trimmed, but they should not be the only perch offered. Add some natural wood perches, cloth rope perches and perches of different diameters for variety. Your bird should be able to wrap its toes around the perch, although some birds enjoy having either a very small or much larger perch for a change of pace.

The different types of toys give our birds enrichment while we are away.

Bird Toys — The Fun Stuff

Birds are very smart, and they need things to learn and do. Most of us can't be with our birds all the time, so we give them something to do when we're not available.

When we walk into a pet store, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the number and variety of bird toys available. Here is a list of various toys and their uses:

Wood and rope toys — good for chewing

Acrylic — long-lasting; birds like to swing from them

Fabric — stuffed animal to snuggle with, especially for baby birds

Leather — fun to chew; make sure it is vegetable-dyed so it's safe

Rope — to hang from or perch on; check for fraying

Bells — some

Mirrors — some birds love them. If a bird gets too possessive of its mirror, you may have to take it out.

Cloth hut or fabric tube — an extra place for your bird to sleep.

Skewers — for hanging food such as vegetables and fruit (may food more appealing for finicky eaters)

Swings and boings — for active play (Eclectus, in particular, enjoy boing toys)

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