

HEALTHY AVIAN DIETS - BASIC FEEDING GUIDELINES FOR COMMONLY KEPT PARROT SPECIES

Suggestions from Dr. Scott Echols



Note: This handout is intended to serve only as a guide of possible food choices for commonly kept parrots. Diet should be adjusted for species variation, health status, breeding status, climate conditions, and physical activity.



Pellets

A high-quality pelleted diet should consist of 20-70% of the diet consumed by the parrot (less for smaller species and more for larger parrots). Feeding 2-3 brands of pellets offers not only more variety in nutrition, but also in appearance and texture.



Whole Grains

Some research in birds supports the idea that the finely ground food used to make pellets can contribute to diarrhea and cause changes to the gut microbiota; adding whole grains to the diet can reduce or eliminate this problem in some birds. Whole grains should consist of 25-30% of the diet consumed by the bird. Larger parrots often prefer these grains to be cooked while smaller birds often prefer them uncooked. They can be mixed and cooked similar to rice, frozen in ice cube trays, and then one "cube" can be defrosted and fed daily. The following human grade grains are recommended; these can be purchased at grocery stores or ordered online.

- Spelt
- Oat groats
- Barley
- Wheatberry (not for small birds)
- Buckwheat
- Millet
- Flax seed
- Chia seed
- Hemp seed



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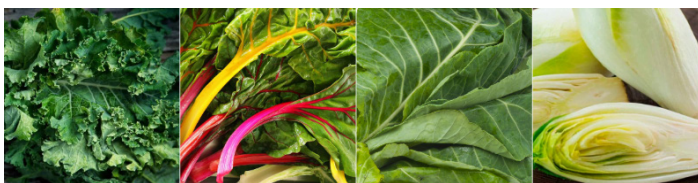
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Fresh fruits/vegetables/beans/legumes should be fed as 25-30% of the diet. Moderation and variety are the keys to good nutrition! The following are the most healthful produce:



Fresh Colorful Veggies

- Jalapeño peppers
- Bell peppers
- Banana peppers
- Serrano peppers
- Yams
- Sweet potatoes
- Broccoli
- Squash
- Zucchini
- Cucumber
- Pumpkin



Dark, Leafy Veggies

- Kale
- Collard greens
- Mustard greens
- Turnip greens
- Chard
- Endive



Herbs

- Dill
- Parsley
- Basil
- Chives
- Cilantro



Berries

- Blueberries
- Strawberries
- Raspberries
- Blackberries



Fruits

- Figs
- Kiwi
- Pomegranate
- Ripe persimmons in small amounts (unripe ones can be irritating to the gut)
- Mango
- Lychee
- Cactus fruit
- Passion fruit



Beans/Legumes

- Peas
- Snap peas
- Snow peas
- Lentils – Sprouted, cooked, or sprouted and cooked
- Garbanzo beans – Sprouted, cooked, or sprouted and cooked
- Mung beans – Sprouted, cooked, or sprouted and cooked

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Foods **NOT** Recommended for Birds

- ✗ Nuts (high in fat; atherosclerosis is so common in pet birds that adding fatty foods is harmful)
- ✗ Flour based foods (bread, tortillas, cookies, crackers, etc.)
- ✗ Dried fruits
- ✗ Fruit juice
- ✗ Foods sweetened with natural or artificial sweeteners
- ✗ Grapes
- ✗ Bananas
- ✗ Citrus fruits
- ✗ Fried foods
- ✗ Any animal-based foods such as dairy or meat
- ✗ Raw beans
- ✗ Seeds (other than those listed above)

Note: While some predictable feeding patterns can be found in certain species, birds can be very individualistic. Depending on health and reproductive status, seasonal variation, boredom, and more, birds may change their 'tastes' and refuse once popular items and try new foods over time. It is a given that most birds prefer high fat items such as nuts and seeds. These foods should be limited to treats (if used at all) and reserved for some birds in breeding scenarios, cold environments, performance or physically active situations and those that require specific high fat diets.

Foraging is very important to the behavioral and physical health of birds. Whenever possible, incorporate foraging strategies into feeding your bird.

Certain species of birds have higher omega-3 fatty acid requirements (that they would normally get from specific nuts and other foods in the wild) and may benefit from supplementation. Also, species such as lorries may be sensitive to iron storage disease and often require low iron diets. Because of these and other idiosyncrasies, consult with an avian veterinarian if you are unsure of your bird's dietary needs.

Feeding Recommendations for Various Species of Birds:

Cockatiels, Grass Parakeets, Budgerigars, Parrotlets, Lovebirds, Pyrrhura Conures (Small Parrots)

Use whole uncooked and/or cracked grains (except for large types such as wheatberry). Smaller leafy veggies such as parsley, dill and cilantro tend to be favored over large leaf varieties. Cut open peppers to expose the seeds. Sprouts and broccoli crowns are a plus! Blackberries, raspberries, figs, kiwi and cactus fruit are generally accepted by this group. Give small pellets as 50% or less of the diet.

'Large' Conures (Sun, Nanday, Patagonian, etc.)

Try both uncooked and cooked (especially spelt, oat groats, wheatberry, barley) grains. Lightly cook or steam yams and broccoli. Feed raw cut peppers. Berries and cut fruit are accepted by some. Try chopping, or cut into thin strips, leafy veggies. Give small to medium pellets as approximately 50% of the diet.

Amazons, Greys, Pionus, Macaws, Cockatoos

Cooked (especially spelt, oat groats, wheatberry, barley) grains are preferred. Offer raw or lightly cooked/steamed yams, pumpkin, and broccoli. Offer chopped or whole peppers, squash, zucchini, etc. Offer whole or chopped fruits. Cooked beans and sprouts can be added to the mix. Some macaws and cockatoos have unique dietary requirements that go beyond the scope of this short paper. Give medium to large pellets as approximately 50% of the diet.

Grapes and bananas are very high in sugar. Farmed citrus fruits are also high in sugar and may increase the risk of iron storage disease for susceptible species. Flour based foods are generally high glycemic (meaning they rapidly turn to sugar in the blood shortly after ingestion). For the same reasons (high sugar content), I don't recommend feeding fruit juice to pets (or even people).

Sincerely,

Scott Echols, DVM, Dipl ABVP (Avian Practice)



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For More Information

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

- Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis
- Veterinary Care for Your Pet Bird*
- Basic Care for Companion Birds*
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Caring for Backyard Chickens
- Digital Scales
- Feather Loss
- Feeding Birds
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Managing Chronic Egg-laying in Your Pet Bird
- Signs of Illness in Companion Birds*
- Ultraviolet Lighting for Companion Birds
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Veterinarian?*
- Zoonotic Diseases in Backyard Poultry*



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*Available in multiple languages. All others are available in English only at this time.

Online Resources

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Our website, www.aav.org, offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help pet bird owners locate avian veterinarians around the world. We also offer a variety of resources such as basic bird care instructions and more. Visit the website today!

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Avian medicine is a distinct and very specialized field that requires extensive training, advanced skills, and facilities specifically designed and equipped to treat and hospitalize birds. The Association of Avian Veterinarians was established to provide veterinarians with this special education, and to keep them up to date with the latest information on bird health. The AAV holds an annual conference on avian medicine and publishes the peer-reviewed Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery. AAV also makes annual contributions toward avian conservation and sponsors studies advancing the understanding of avian medicine.



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