How to Keep Your Canary or Finch Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take your finch to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then once annually for examinations.
- ✓ Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering greens and herbs, toys designed for very small birds, and foraging opportunities.
- ✓ Feed a fresh, high-quality formulated diet according to the manufacturer's recommendations, supplemented with fresh chopped fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently.
- ✓ Many birds enjoy bathing. Try providing a warm water bath. Finches prefer not to be sprayed with a water bottle.
- ✓ Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

Finches can easily become injured if they escape from the cage, though some of these dangers can be hazardous for birds inside their cages as well. Watch out especially for:

- ✗ Ceiling fans
- ✗ Stove tops with hot burners, pans or skillets
- ✗ Fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- ✗ Tobacco and cigarette smoke
- ✗ Chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- ✗ Toxic houseplants
- ✗ Pesticides or chemical cleaners
- ✗ Dogs, cats and unsupervised children
- ✗ Sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini-blinds or linoleum)
- ✗ Plug-in air fresheners, scented candles

If A Finch Gets Sick

Avian veterinarians are trained to take care of all birds, large and small. Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care and proper diet and housing. Any new birds entering the flock should be quarantined for a period of at least 15 days before being mixed in with the group to monitor for signs of disease. If signs of illness are seen, an examination should be performed by a veterinarian and appropriate diagnostics should be performed. Commonly seen medical problems that warrant a trip to the veterinarian include trouble breathing, weight loss, egg binding, trauma, diarrhea, and feather cysts.

Enjoy Your Finches!

Finches and canaries are beautiful birds, entertaining to watch and pleasant to listen to. We hope that you and your birds will have many enjoyable years together.

For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting www.AAV.org and click on "Find a Vet."

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CANARIES
AND OTHER FINCHES



Companion Bird Care

SERIES

History of Pet Finches

Finches are small birds with pleasant, melodious songs that have been popular pets for many centuries. Common pet finches include canary, zebra, lady Gouldian, society, and java finches. Selective breeding has resulted in the development of many different colors, patterns, and song abilities. All of these small perching birds make delightful and entertaining companions when cared for appropriately.

Is My Finch Male or Female?

Male and female finches of some species have obvious plumage differences, with the males more brightly colored and patterned than the females. Others exhibit behavioral differences in singing, courtship, or nesting behavior. Males usually have melodious songs, perform a dance, hop in various postures, and build nests. Females usually have more of a chirp or single-note call, and are more passive during courtship. Laboratory methods using DNA technology can also be used for sex determination.

What Should I Feed My Finch?

A balanced diet is essential for the good health of any bird. Most avian veterinarians recommend a high-quality formulated diet supplemented with fresh organic vegetables. Foods like broccoli and leafy greens are often relished by small birds. Occasional fruits may be offered as well. Uneaten fresh produce should be removed after a few hours to prevent it from spoiling and making your bird sick. A small amount of seed or millet is acceptable, but it should not constitute a significant part of the diet. Finches that eat only seeds develop nutritional deficiencies and subsequent medical problems that shorten their lifespans. It is not necessary to provide grit or gravel to finches; they are able to digest their food without it and, in fact, sometimes excessive ingestion of grit leads to gastrointestinal blockage. If you choose to offer grit, it should be soluble grit such as cuttlebone, oyster shell, or limestone; these also serve as good calcium sources for breeding birds. During molting and reproduction, a high protein commercial egg-food can be fed daily.

Housing Your Finch

Housing needs vary with the number and species of finches kept. Some finches get along well in mixed aviaries, while others do better with just members of their own species. Some species are territorial and others have well developed pecking orders. Aggression between birds can be reduced by providing ample space and multiple perches, food bowls, and water dishes. New birds should be introduced gradually (in side by side cages) before being introduced into established collections. If a bird at the bottom of the pecking order is being bullied to the point that is it underweight and feather plucked, it should be moved to another cage.

Cages and aviaries should be as large as possible to allow for flight. Finches fly in a horizontal rather than a vertical direction, so choose a cage that is long rather than tall. Make sure that the cage bars are no more than 1 cm apart. The safest cages are made of stainless steel or powder-coated metal. Place toys and perches in such a way that they do not prevent your bird from flying from one side of its cage to the other.

The bottom of the cage or aviary should either have a wire grate that fecal matter can fall through, or be covered in paper that can be frequently changed. Pine, cedar, and sand are not recommended as flooring substrates due to problems they can cause with breathing and gastrointestinal function. Food and water dishes should be washed daily with hot water and soap. Cages should be routinely cleaned to remove droppings and uneaten food.

Perches should vary in size, shape and texture. Wood perches, such as manzanita or java fern, are ideal because their natural variability in shape allows birds to perch and not constantly be putting pressure on the same part of the foot all the time. Soft perches like rope perches can be used as well. Avoid the routine use of wooden dowel perches because they lack variability in shape and can lead to bumblefoot. Sand paper perch covers are also not recommended.



Nests can be provided for those species that prefer to sleep off of a perch. However, it is important to note that a nest can stimulate mating and egg laying, which is not always desirable. If a nest is used, safe nesting material can be provided as well. Commercially available nesting material, paper towels or tissue paper can be used. Avoid the use of string or threads, as they can get wrapped around toes and cut off circulation. If no nest is provided, consider creating a place to hide in the cage; artificial foliage or a piece of finch-safe fabric clipped to the top bars of the cage can be used to produce a hiding place for scared or nervous birds.

Small birds enjoy toys and items with which to play, though these items need to be appropriately sized. Toys with strips of paper or cardboard are fun to shred, and small bells and mirrors are fun to gaze into and peck. Leaves and branches from trees like citrus, apple or willow can be used for shredding enjoyment as long as they have not been treated with any herbicides or pesticides. Small birds can also benefit from foraging if given the right items with which to do this. Pellets and seeds can be covered with strips of paper or even buried in hay that birds have to sift through to get at the food items.

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