

Feeding your pet parrot

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Psittacines – parrots, parakeets, macaws, cockatiels, budgies – are probably the most popular pet birds. In order to keep them healthy and prevent a number of health issues it's important to provide a balanced diet.

As a general rule, most Psittacines are herbivorous, eating a wide variety of fruits and seeds. Some species have particular diet requirements that should always be met (e.g. lorries eat mostly nectar). In the wild, birds spend a lot of time foraging for food, while in a cage they have their food always available. Some food items can be scattered, presented in toys or other creative ways or used as positive reinforcement in training, providing important environmental enrichment.

Main Food items



Pellets – Complete commercial foods, with several brands available. Should be the main diet component for most Psittacine species. There are special types of pellets for species with special diet requirements (e.g. lorries).



Seed mixes – although quite popular, seed mixes are usually unbalanced and nutritionally deficient. Avoid or reduce the amount of sunflower seeds. Some species (e.g. cockatiel) are more adapted to seed-based diets.



Vegetables – should be offered fresh daily. These include: peppers, sweet potato, tomatoes, sweet corn, courgetti, as well as some dark leafy greens. Any leftover food should be removed if not eaten.



Fruit – Small amounts of fresh fruit can be offered daily. Some fruits like mango, papaya, melon, figs and berries are safe to parrots, while some (e.g. avocado) or some seeds (e.g. cherries) can be toxic and dangerous.



Nuts – Very small amounts of nuts can be offered daily or used as treat. Walnuts and Brazilian nuts are safe but almonds should not be used. Some species, like macaws, are adapted to process better these fatty and oily foods.

Calcium supplements – should be offered on a daily, specially to African grey parrots. There are a number of commercial options available.



Dangerous foods



Some food items can be toxic or dangerous to parrots:

- Avocado
- Onions or garlic
- Seeds of almonds, apples, cherries, plums and peaches
- Chocolate
- Comfrey
- Sugar free candies (contain Xylitol)

Other food items, although not toxic, can lead to health problems in birds and shouldn't be offered:

- Foods high in fat, sugar and/or salt
- Processed and most cooked food items
- Dairy products

Finally, some food item should be offered with caution:

- Peanuts (can have some fungal spores or toxins)
- Rhubarb (contains oxalates)
- Grit – parrots don't require grit to digest their food because they dehusk all seed with their beaks. When overeaten, grit can cause intestinal blockage and constipation.

Diet related disease in pet parrots

Unbalanced diets can lead to some common health problems:

- Obesity
- Low calcium levels (Specially African grey parrots)
- Poor immune system
- Poor feathering and sometimes, feather plucking
- Liver disease