

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR BIRD'S DIET

Feeding Your Bird

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

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Research and experience show that birds stay healthier and may live longer on formulated diets than on seed-based diets. Ideally, most companion bird diets should be composed of a minimum of 75% formulated food, with the remainder in produce and table food.

FORMULATED DIETS (PELLETS)

- Pellets are manufactured to meet the specific nutritional needs of companion birds — they are the foundation of a healthy diet, not a supplement to seed
- There are several brands of good quality pellets available through both the internet and pet stores — plainer-looking diets with fewer additives are generally preferred over highly colored and scented varieties
- Small birds such as cockatiels, budgies, parrotlets, canaries, and finches do well on 50% pellets and 50% seed, supplemented with produce and small amounts of table food
- Pellets are sometimes mixed with seed -- we do not recommend these varieties. You can expect your feathered friend to be like a small child and pick out all the goodies

Bird Size	Species Examples	Recommended Brands
Large	Macaws, Cockatoos, African Greys, Amazons, Eclectus, Pionus, some Conures	Harrison's Adult Lifetime Coarse, Zupreem Avian Maintenance, Scenic, Roudybush, Lafeber's, Zeigler
Small	Cockatiels, Budgies, Lovebirds, Conures, Doves, Grey-cheeks, Pigeons, Parrotlets, Quakers	Harrison's Adult Lifetime Fine, Kaytee Exact Original, Scenic Hot 'n Healthy, Lafeber's, Roudybush, Zeigler
Very small / softbills	Canaries, Finches, Budgies, Cockatiels, Doves, Lovebirds, Pigeons, Parrotlets	Harrison's Adult Lifetime Mash, Lafeber's Finch Granules

LOW IRON DIETS

- Certain species — including toucans, mynahs, lorries, and Peking robins — are prone to **iron storage disease**, which is usually fatal
- These birds require specially formulated low-iron foods — Harrison's Bird Foods are recommended; other low-iron brands may also be available through pet stores
- Produce and table foods high in iron should also be minimized or avoided: grapes, raisins, dark leafy greens, red meat, and poultry

PRODUCE & TABLE FOOD

- Most produce and table foods that are good for people are nutritional for birds as well
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly before feeding and remove after **4 to 8 hours** to avoid spoilage

Vegetables	Fruit (small amounts)	Protein (small amounts)
Dark leafy greens (dandelion, spinach, mustard greens, kale, bok choy, parsley and other herbs)	Tropical fruits are more likely to have more nutrients than North American fruit. Orange fruits (papaya, mango, cantaloupe) are highest in vitamin A	Cooked meat, fish, or chicken
Green beans	Citrus is fine in small amounts	Cooked beans and tofu
Carrots, broccoli, cauliflower		Cooked egg (white and yolk)
Cooked sweet potatoes		Cheese and yogurt (lowfat or nonfat)
Frozen mixed vegetables (thawed)		Nuts

FOODS TO AVOID

Avocado and chocolate are poisonous to birds and can be fatal. These must never be offered under any circumstances.

- Foods high in salt and preservatives are harmful — birds are **very sodium sensitive**. Avoid chips, crackers, pretzels, and preserved meats.
- Light green vegetables such as celery and iceberg lettuce are high in water and low in nutrients — minimize or eliminate. If a bird will only eat lettuce, Romaine is the best option.
- Seed is **excessively high in fat** and low in many vital nutrients — it is also a common source of bacterial contamination from rodents during farm storage
- Freezing, refrigerating, or microwaving seed does not eliminate bacteria — eliminating seed entirely is advantageous for birds with a history of bacterial problems

SUPPLEMENTS

- Birds consuming at least 50% of their diet as formulated food **do not require** vitamin or mineral supplements — further supplementation **can actually be toxic**
- This includes vitamin and mineral powders and drops, grit, gravel, cuttlebone, and mineral blocks — unnecessary for birds on a properly formulated diet
- We do not recommend grit for any bird, parrots and passerines such as canaries do not need it. It is possible for grit to be contaminated with toxic metals.

CONVERTING TO A FORMULATED DIET

- Some birds convert quickly; others take weeks or months — owner persistence is the single most important factor in successful conversion
- During the first few days, many birds express their displeasure by screaming or throwing food — this is normal and usually resolves as they adjust

Baselines for a forced conversion

- Your bird should be in good health – we recommend starting with a visit to your veterinarian
- Weighing your bird weekly (same day, first thing in the morning) will let you monitor for any significant drops in weight. You may see up to 10% weight loss while converting to pellets
- Budgies and smaller birds are the most likely to have a problem with the “2 hour of seed” method of conversion. Weigh daily or use the gruel method.

Method 1 — “2 Hours Seed”:

- Offer formulated food in a separate dish, available at all times, change daily to keep fresh
- Restrict previous foods (seed, table food) to one hour twice daily — morning and evening — but offer as much of these foods as they want to eat
- Most birds will begin nibbling formulated food within days to weeks; gradually withdraw previous foods until they compose 25% or less of the diet
- If you have more than 1 bird make sure to have 2 well separated feeding stations. This will prevent one bird from “hogging all the food” during the seed hours

Method 2 — “Gruel Method”:

- Soften formulated food in water and mix in small amounts of the usual food (such as seed)
- The bird must dig through the mixture to reach the seed and typically develops a taste for pellets in the process
- Gradually reduce or eliminate seed from the mixture over time

Other Options:

- Some birds will eat pellets if they are soaking in a diluted juice they prefer – do not use orange juice or other citrus as the high pH may affect nutrients
- Some birds are willing to try food they see you excited to eat or that you are offering them. Pretend to eat the pellets excitedly...if there are two of you, offer the food to each other where the bird can see you. If your bird does not take the food, eat it then turn your back and walk away so they know it was delicious!

Be sure your bird has had a recent veterinary exam before changing the diet — this screens for any underlying health problems and establishes a current weight baseline. Do not begin dietary conversion without this step.

Questions? We've heard weirder ones. Call us.

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