Parrot Diets

A CORRECTLY BALANCED DIET IS ESSENTIAL TO A BIRDS HEALTH.

Parrots in the wild eat a very varied diet, consisting of young leaves, blossoms, fruit, some seed, vegetables, and insects.

An inappropriate diet can lead to overgrowth of the beak.

As there is no infallible information as to exactly what parrots eat in the wild, research has been done to discover exactly what nutrients are needed. The following diet is recommended for parrots as it ensures that the bird receives the correct nutrients, vitamins and minerals: 70% of the diet should be a high quality pelleted food (eg Kaytee, Nutribird, Harrisons); the other 30% should consist of fruit, vegetables, human food, cooked beans, peas, lentils and limited seed and nuts. Vegetables are very important as they are full of essential vitamins and minerals. Dark green veggies (such as romaine lettuce, dandelion leaves, green beans, carrot tops and beet greens) and orange vegetables (squash, mealies, carrots, red pepper, and chilies) are the best to feed. If a seed mix containing some pellets is fed, the parrot will usually pick out the seeds to eat and leave the pellets.

An example of a complete diet (pellets, fruit, vegetables and water)

Parrots can be fed a varied mixture of human food. Just remember that due to the size of the parrot, feeding them an entire apple is the same as a human eating 20 apples. The human food given to parrots must be low in fat, especially animal fat, and low in salt. Cooked pastas, cereals (preferably whole grain products), cooked lean meat,

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cooked eggs, cheese and yoghurt are a favorite with parrots; just remember not to overdo it.

Feather colour change caused by feeding an inadequate diet.

Supplementation is generally not needed if the diet is correct but calcium can be supplemented especially during the breeding season. Calcium requirements are higher for African Grey Parrots so one can add a supplement occasionally.

A feather plucking bird, this condition is often caused by feeding an inadequate diet.

Parrots need to have access to at least 15 minutes of direct (unfiltered) sunlight each day as it ensures that their metabolisms are functioning correctly. Make sure that the bird has fresh water, shade and is safe from predators. Do not give a parrot sand or grit as it is unnecessary for them and it may cause impactions if eaten. Never allow your bird access to the following: Avocado, Parsley, Chocolate, Caffeine, Alcohol or Nicotine. These are poisonous to parrots.
A frequent problem seen is multiple nutrient deficiencies in birds that eat only sunflower seed. This seed is very tasty and most birds will choose it over any other kind of food. In any parrots natural habitat, there are no sunflower fields so why should parrots be eating this diet in captivity? A sunflower seed diet is deficient in more than twelve nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, vitamin A, vitamin K, certain amino acids (lysine and methionine), B vitamins, including vitamin B12, manganese, zinc, iron, iodine and selenium. Sunflowers are also very high in fat, containing mainly oil. This diet can lead to obesity, nutritional problems, poor feather quality, seizures and a compromised immune system. A teaspoon of sunflower may be given daily ONLY as a treat.

Before attempting a diet change ensure that your bird is healthy as the diet conversion can place some stress on the body. Some breeds of birds have very specific dietary requirements so always check before making a diet change.
Amazons are one of the breeds with specific dietary requirements.

When changing or modifying the diet the bird can sometimes be induced to eat if you eat some of the new food in front of him (remember birds are flock animals and as you are his flock, he will be inclined to eat what you eat).

The new food can also be placed in the highest bowl in the cage as birds are more inclined to eat from that bowl.

Remove some of the parrots toys so the bird will be forced to play with the food, the perches can also be removed so the bird has to sit on the food bowl, and be closer to the new food.

Vegetables and fruit that your bird is not used to may be grated to make them less intimidating to the parrot. If your bird enjoys fruit, mix the fruit in with the pellets as then when the bird has a mouthful of fruit he is encouraged to eat some pellets as well. Some birds may starve themselves rather than try a new food so find out what the correct weight is for your bird and ensure that he does not lose too much weight through the conversion process. More than 10% of the total body mass is too much. Should weight loss be excessive, allow the parrot access to the old diet for a week and then slowly start the process of conversion over.

Try placing the old diet in the cage for 20 minutes in the mornings and evenings and then removing it and putting the new food in for the rest of the day.

The old and new food can also be mixed together and the original diet slowly phased out over several weeks as the new food becomes more acceptable.

The process of converting a bird to a new diet can be a long and painful one. Tantrums will be thrown, screaming will occur but the bird WILL learn to eat his new food if you persevere.

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