

Caging the Companion Parrot

The ideal bird cage should be spacious and clean, with multiple perches and stimulating toys. Specific cage requirements will vary with the species and the amount of time your bird will be expected to spend in its cage. Purchase the cage from a reputable manufacturer as many homemade cages are made of potentially toxic materials.

- **Cage size** is the most important factor.
 - Buy the largest cage suitable for the species you will own.
 - Choose a cage that has more vertical than horizontal space.
 - Small, flighted birds such as finches and canaries also need more vertical space, however they also require cages that allow them to fly back and forth.

- **Cage bars** must be close enough that birds cannot stick their heads through them, but far enough apart to prevent trapping of limbs or toes.
 - Welds should be smooth at the joints with no rough edges.
 - Beware of welds do not appear to be factory applied. The solder on cages of unknown origin may contain toxic substances such as lead.
 - Average horizontal bar spacing
 - 3/8 to 7/16 in. Budgerigar, canary, parrotlet, lovebird
 - 5/8 in. Cockatiel
 - 1/2 to 3/4 in. Cockatiel, small conure, other small parrots
 - Amazon, African Grey, small cockatoo, large conure, Ring-necked parakeet, Pionus, Eclectus
 - 3/4 to 1 in. Macaw, large cockatoo, some Amazons/Eclectus
 - 3/4 to 1.5 in. Macaw, large cockatoo, some Amazons/Eclectus

- **Place the cage** where the bird can observe household activity and yet not always be in the middle of activity.
 - Place the cage away from sources of extreme heat or cold such as heaters, stoves, exterior doors, or air conditioning.
 - As an area of temperature extremes, the kitchen is not recommended for housing pet birds. There is also a risk of dangerous cooking fumes such as Teflon released from superheated nonstick cookware.

- Avoid decorative cages sold by non-pet retailers. These cages are usually unsuitable for birds.

- Offer an assortment of **perches** with different diameters, shapes, and textures.
 - Natural wood perches from trees such as dogwood, fruit trees or willow trees are ideal.
 - Never offer perches made from concrete or other abrasive materials as the only perch or the highest perch.

- Do not offer sandpaper perches at all as they are too abrasive for the feet.
 - Rope perches are gentle on the feet, but check them frequently. Remove the rope when it becomes soiled or frayed; unraveled rope strands can become entangled in the toes. (Regular nail trims will minimize this risk). Also monitor your bird to make sure it does not eat bits of rope.
 - PVC piping is impervious to beak damage, however it can be slippery. Parrots do best on PVC perches that have been sanded or bent into shapes for secure footing.
- Place **dishes** high to minimize the risk of contamination from droppings.
 - Newspaper makes an ideal **substrate** for lining bird cages. Butcher paper and paper grocery bags also work well. Avoid materials like wood chips and corn cob. These bedding are messy, birds may ingest them, and if not kept scrupulously clean, fungus may grow on these substrates—increasing the risk of Aspergillosis.
 - Don't forget to consider your needs as well.
 - A pull-out bottom tray and large entry door make cleaning easier. A large entry door also provides easy access to your bird.
 - Aprons or seed guards keep debris in the cage and off the floor.
 - Outside access feeders decrease the risk of escape.
 - Casters allow a large cage to be easily moved, while a handle allows one to carry a small cage.
 - **Accessories**
 - An outside mounted **water bottle** may help to conserve interior cage space. Birds must learn to drink from water bottles. Watch out for birds to stuff the sipper with seeds and other materials.
 - A free-standing perch is a wise investment. Cages with playpens may also work well for some birds; however remember that behavioral problems related to dominance may arise if the bird is at a level higher than its owner.

References

Chamberlain S. 10 common problems solved. *Bird Talk* Feb. 1999. Pp. 46-49.

Lightfoot T, Nacewicz CL. Psittacine behavior. In: Bays TB, Lightfoot T, Mayer J (eds). *Exotic Pet Behavior*. Saunders; St. Louis, Missouri, 2006. p. 65.

Written Sep 1997, updated Dec. 9, 2007.