

## Foods for Different Pet Avian Species

**Note:** This chart is intended to serve only as a guide of *possible* food choices for commonly kept parrots, passerines and select other species. Diet should be adjusted for species variation, health status, climate conditions and physical activity.

Pellets: Brand \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount and/or percentage of diet: \_\_\_\_\_

| <u>Whole Grain</u> | <u>Cooked</u> | <u>Uncooked</u> |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Spelt              |               |                 |
| Oat Groats         |               |                 |
| Barley             |               |                 |
| Steel Cut Oats     |               |                 |
| Wheatberry         |               |                 |
| Buckwheat          |               |                 |
| Millet             |               |                 |
| Flax Seed          |               |                 |
| Chia Seed          |               |                 |
| Hemp Seed          |               |                 |
| Total Amount:      |               |                 |

**Fresh Colorful Veggies:** jalapeño peppers, bell peppers, banana peppers, Serrano peppers, yams, sweet potatoes, broccoli, squash, zucchini, cucumber, pumpkin, bean sprouts, snow peas, snap peas  
Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dark Leafy Greens:** kale, collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, chard, endive  
Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**Herbs:** dill, parsley, basil, chives, cilantro  
Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**Berries:** blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries  
Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**Fruits:** figs, kiwi, pomegranate, persimmons, mango, lychee, cactus fruit, passion fruit  
Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**Nuts:** walnuts, almonds, pine nuts, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts  
Total Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*Foods NOT Recommended for Birds:** flour based foods<sup>§</sup> (bread, tortillas, cookies, crackers, etc), dried fruits, fruit juice, foods sweetened with natural or artificial sweeteners, grapes, bananas, citrus fruits, fried foods and fatty animal meat. No raw beans. (Cooked beans are acceptable for some large parrots.) Grit is not needed for caged pet birds however can be beneficial for ground feeding birds eating tough fibrous foods (usually not a concern with pets).

<sup>§</sup>Some items made with low glycemic flour may be acceptable

## Tips for Feeding Healthy Foods to Select Birds

**Note:** While some predictable feeding patterns can be found in certain species, birds can be very individualistic. Depending on health and reproductive status, seasonal variation, boredom and more, birds may change their 'tastes' and refuse once popular items and try new foods over time. It is a given that most birds prefer high fat items such as nuts and seeds. These foods should be limited to treats (if used at all) and reserved for some birds in breeding scenarios, cold environments, performance or physically active situations and those that require specific high fat diets.

Foraging is very important to the behavioral and physical health of birds. Whenever possible, incorporate foraging strategies into feeding your bird.

Certain species of birds have higher omega-3 fatty acid requirements (that they would normally get from specific nuts and other foods in the wild) and may benefit from supplementation. Also, species such as lorries may be sensitive to iron storage disease and often require low iron diets. Because of these and other idiosyncrasies, consult with an avian veterinarian if you are unsure of your bird's dietary needs.

### **Cockatiels, Grass Parakeets, Budgerigars, Parrotlets, Lovebirds, Pyrrhura Conures (Small Parrots)**

Use whole uncooked and/or cracked grains (except for large types such as wheatberry). Smaller leafy veggies such as parsley, dill and cilantro tend to be favored over large leaf varieties. Cut open peppers to expose the seeds. Sprouts and broccoli crowns are a plus! Blackberries, raspberries, figs, kiwi and cactus fruit are generally accepted by this group. Give small pellets as 50% or less of the diet.

### **Doves, Pigeons (Columbiformes)**

Try whole uncooked grains (any size). Berries (if small enough) and chopped fruit is generally eaten. Leafy veggies can be offered as a small portion of the diet and should be finely chopped. Give small pellets as 50% or less of the diet.

### **Finches**

Feed small uncooked whole grains. Smaller leafy greens/herbs and broccoli crowns attached to the cage using a clothespin are often well accepted. Finely chopped peppers, squash and sweet potato will be eaten by some. Cut fresh fig and some berries are popular with finches. Give small pellets as 50% or less of the diet.

### **'Large' Conures (Sun, Nanday, Patagonian, etc)**

Try both uncooked and cooked (especially spelt, oat groats, wheatberry, barley) grains. Lightly cook or steam yams and broccoli. Feed raw cut peppers. Berries and cut fruit are accepted by some. Try chopping, or cut into thin strips, leafy veggies. Give small to medium pellets as 50-70% of the diet.

### **Amazons, African Greys, Pionus, Macaws, Cockatoos**

Cooked (especially spelt, oat groats, wheatberry, barley) grains are preferred. Offer raw or lightly cooked/steamed yams, pumpkin and broccoli. Offer chopped or whole peppers, squash, zucchini, etc. Offer whole or chopped fruits. Cooked beans and sprouts can be added to a mix. Some macaws and cockatoos have unique dietary requirements that go beyond the scope of this short paper. Give medium to large pellets as 50-70% of the diet.

## Diet Conversion for Seed Junkie Birds

**Note:** If too abrupt, diet conversions may lead to emaciation in death in some birds. To best assess the progress of a bird during a diet change, weigh the bird regularly and monitor for normal production of droppings. If your bird is sick, consult with an avian veterinarian prior to changing your pet's diet.

**Hunt and Peck** - This works best with small parrots and Columbiformes that are hand tame including budgerigars, grass parakeets, cockatiels, parrotlets, doves and more. This also works with some larger parrot species.

**Method:** Place the new food items (preferably small dry foods [pellets, whole grains, etc] that you can easily pick up and separate) on a hard flat surface (light color works best so the food is easily visible). Place your bird on the flat surface with the food. With your bird watching, pick up and drop the new food items one at a time. The idea is that you get your bird interested enough to start investigating, tasting and ultimately eating the new food.

**Bounce, Hunt and Peck**- This is very similar to 'Hunt and Peck' in that smaller parrot species and Columbiformes tend to convert well using this approach.

**Method:** Place the new food items (preferably small dry foods [pellets, whole grains, etc] that easily separate) on a thick paper towel or cardboard (light color works best so the food is easily visible). Place the food and towel/cardboard on a hard surface. With your bird watching, tap on the towel/cardboard such that the food items jump around. The 'peck' drive found in many ground feeding birds stimulates them to try the new food.

**Slowly Diminish the Old Diet**- Commonly used with large parrots and those used to eating out of a bowl.

**Method:** Place 50% of the old diet and 50% of the new diet in the same bowl. It is important to only offer a day's worth of food in the bowl or in total if multiple bowls are used. Otherwise, your bird may simply eat the old food and avoid or throw out the new items. Every few days to a week, proportionally reduce the amount of old food and increase the new items. Within a few weeks to months, the new food should represent 100% of the bird's diet.

**See What I am Eating**- This works well with social larger parrots that like to be involved in your daily life.

**Method:** Have healthy foods in a bowl (that you are eating from) in front of your bird. Then periodically offer foods from the bowl to your bird. If your bird accepts the foods, start putting the new items in the food bowl on top of the old diet (instead of handing it directly to your bird). Next, place the new foods in the bird's bowl before you eat from your own bowl. Once you are comfortable that your bird is regularly eating the new items, reduce or eliminate the old food.

**'Forage and Find'**- This works great if your bird is already foraging. Otherwise, you may have to teach your bird to forage first.

**Method:** Use simple foraging toys to hide new food items in place of the old diet. Birds comfortable with foraging often try the new hidden food as they find it. Using this method, you can also see what foods your bird does and does not like when you hide individual food items in separate foraging toys.