

Pet Bird Do's and Don'ts

Foods that are dangerous to birds include Xylitol (sugar substitute), avocado (all parts), guacamole, chocolate, cocoa, alcohol, caffeine, onion, mushrooms, the pits of apricots, peaches, plums, prunes, and seeds of the cherimoya fruit, as well as foods containing large amounts of salt, sugar, grease, preservatives, artificial coloring, and other additives. Obvious dangers such as moldy foods. Parrots should be fed the same quality of food that is suitable for human infants.

PTFE treated products, such as Teflon and other name brands of non-stick cookware can kill birds by releasing odorless, deadly gasses when overheated. PTFE is used in some space heaters, ranges, ovens, stove-top burner bibs or liners, heat lamps, irons, griddles, bread makers, woks, waffle makers, electric skillets, crock pots, popcorn poppers, coffee makers, roasters, curling irons, hair dryers, and more. Check labels before purchase.

SELF CLEANING OVENS use extremely high heat to burn off oven debris, and in the process create toxic fumes that can harm or kill parrots.

COOKING BAGS, especially those treated with PTFE, emit harmful fumes during cooking that kill birds. Any substance that releases smoke and/or fumes when heated should be avoided in bird homes.

KITCHENS, especially when cooking is in progress, are unsafe for birds. The obvious hazards of open flames, hot ranges, open pots of hot food or boiling water are as deadly as smoke or other toxic fumes, even from dishwashers if a plastic item falls into a heating element during the dry cycle.

GRIT is not necessary for parrots and can cause impaction of the digestive system.

IMPORTED CERAMIC CROCKS often contain toxic metals that can leach into bird food and water. Stainless steel, Pyrex and other glass is safer.

HALOGEN LIGHT FIXTURES such as torchiere-style floor lamps create extreme heat and can kill birds that land on them. Choose only bird-safe light fixtures for bird homes.

LITTER made of walnut shells or corn cobs can cause life-threatening impaction if ingested by birds. They also harbor fungal spores when soiled or wet. Newspapers are safer.

METALS such as lead, zinc, copper, and iron can cause metal toxicosis if ingested by birds. Some sources are house keys, (especially gold colored keys), galvanized wire, lead-based paints, metallic paints, paints containing zinc, linoleum, vinyl mini-blinds, foil from champagne and wine bottles, lead weights, bells with lead clappers, stained glass, some improperly-glazed ceramics, costume jewelry, mirror backing, copper glass, copper pennies, zinc oxide, artist paints containing cadmium, and cardboard or paper with high gloss inks. Aviary wire treated with zinc is also dangerous.

QUIK-STOP and other styptic products should never be applied to avian skin. They are safe for bleeding toenails when broken or cut too short, but they destroy skin and should not be used. For broken or pulled blood feathers, either cornstarch or flour are safer. Aloe gel can be applied first to help the flour or cornstarch to adhere to the wound and to help with pain and healing.

CATS, DOGS, FERRETS (and many other pets) are a danger to birds. The slightest cat scratch can infect birds with Pasteurella bacteria and immediate vet treatment is required to save the bird's life. Never allow birds to interact with ANY pet without close supervision.

FLEA COLLARS AND SPRAYS emit toxins into the air and should not be used in bird homes. Lice shampoo also contains dangerous toxins and should never be used on birds. Tea tree based products are also unsafe.

PESTICIDE SPRAYS, NO-PEST STRIPS, AND FOGGERS poison the air and can kill birds. Any bug spray or bait is potentially toxic to your pet bird.

WING CLIPS should always be checked on frequently to prevent flight related accidents. Clipped wings do not prevent flying away completely. Wing clipped birds can often fly well enough to escape so they should be protected by a harness or carrier when taken outside.

TRANSPARENT AND REFLECTIVE SURFACES like glass windows, doors, and mirrors should be shown to flighted birds. Many birds can be trained to avoid large expanses of glass by repeatedly holding the bird on your hand and imitating flight toward the glass and then lightly pressing their beak, feet, and body against the surfaces. Decals can be used as a visible reminder.

CEILING FANS should not be used in homes while birds are out of the cage.

OTHER DANGERS to birds are open windows and doors, open containers of water (sinks, toilets, tubs, boiling water), poisonous or thorny houseplants, electrical wires, medication, visitors should always be educated on how they can help keep your bird safe. Do not assume they know anything about the care of birds.

TOYS should be examined for loose parts that could lodge in a bird's throat. Loose strings and threads can trap and cut off circulation to necks, wings, legs, and toes. Use only stainless steel (not zinc) "quick links" as toy fasteners and never use strings, chains, or ropes long enough to wrap around a birds' neck or other body parts.

WOOD SHAVINGS such as cedar and redwood are toxic to birds and should not be used in cages or aviaries. Newspaper is a safer cage liner.

PRESSURE TREATED LUMBER conventional plywood, and particle board contain a variety of toxic substances. Untreated pine boards are a safer choice.

HOUSEPLANTS and fertilizer including fertilizer spikes can poison birds so they should be kept out of the home. Some of the most common poisonous houseplants are azalea, oleander, castor bean, sago palm, yew plants, dieffenbachia (dumb cane), asparagus fern, daffodils, flower bulbs, mistletoe, poinsettia, philodendron, and potato sprouts or eyes. Choose only non-poisonous plants for bird homes. Please note this is not a complete list.

CIGARETTES, CIGARS, PIPES, AND OTHER SMOKING SUBSTANCES should never be used in air space shared by birds. Passive inhalation of smoke, including smoke from burning incense, damages the sensitive avian respiratory system, eyes and skin. Nicotine can settle on perches and other cage surfaces and cause the self-mutilation of feet, legs, and skin in birds.

AEROSOLIZED GROOMING PRODUCTS should never be used in the breathing space of parrots. Perfume, hairspray, and other grooming products can damage the avian respiratory system.

AIR FRESHENERS including plug-in air fresheners and scented sprays are considered unsafe. Bird deaths from using products like Febreze in the home have been reported on many occasions. To safely freshen the air, simmer organic spices like cinnamon, cloves, vanilla, and citrus rinds.

SCENTED CANDLES release toxins when burned. They also pose a burn risk.

CARPET POWDERS AND SPRAYS such as Scotchgard, Carpet Fresh, as well as similar treatments for upholstery (like Febreze), contain toxins which are dispersed into the air when they are vacuumed so they should never be used in bird homes. Carpets can be cleaned safely with solutions of water and baking soda, vinegar, or Grapefruit Seed Extract.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PRODUCTS like pine oil, ammonia, mold and mildew cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, drain cleaners, furniture polish, oven cleaners, dishwasher detergents, car cleaning products, and laundry products, including bleach, can irritate or burn the skin, eyes and respiratory tracts of birds when used in their air space. Spray starch is also toxic to birds.

HOME IMPROVEMENT PRODUCTS that create fumes include fresh paint, new carpet, drapes, furniture and flooring that uses toxic glues. The outgassing of toxic chemicals from new furnishings, paints, solvents, adhesives, various finishes, and other building materials are sometimes described as the "new smell" and can damage the avian respiratory system.

MEDICATION medication or pills can look attractive but are dangerous. Natural remedies containing tree oil, which contains the oil of the melaleuca tree, as well as all over-the-counter medications should be kept out of the reach of parrots.

MOLD on food or in the air is dangerous to parrots. Aspergillus mold can cause the deadly disease, aspergillosis. It can grow on improperly handled and stored foods, especially grains such as corn. Excessive moisture in bathrooms promotes the growth of various molds in homes.

CARBON MONOXIDE is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas produced by furnaces and other heaters. Birds in poorly ventilated, heated areas are at high risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. It robs the blood of oxygen and can be particularly harmful to animals and humans with heart ailments when inhaled at levels often found indoors.

DRY CLEANED CLOTHING should be aired outside or in an airspace not shared by birds until there is no remaining odor. The chemical "perc" (perchloroethylene) causes cancer in lab animals.

MOTHBALLS and moth-repellent cakes and crystals contain paradichlorobenzene. It also is found in toilet disinfectants and in deodorizers, and it causes cancer in lab animals.

DISEASE EXPOSURE should be avoided by quarantining all new birds from your existing flock or companion birds for one to three months. Taking birds to pet stores, bird fairs, swap shops and other bird gatherings can expose them to deadly, incurable diseases.

HUMAN SALIVA contains pathogens that are deadly to birds. Never allow a bird to place a beak in your mouth or nose, nor to "clean your teeth".

CLEANLINESS is important to the prevention of bacterial infections. Wash your hands frequently when working with birds and preparing their food and dishes.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS should be left with caregivers when you're away. Leave your vet's contact information as well as hotline numbers near the phone and advise your caregiver about potential emergencies and what to do