# Bird Cages, Perches, Dishes, and Other Accessories

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The most important item needed before your bird is brought home is a cage. Remember, even birds that come out of the cage to socialize spend a large part of the day in their cage. Providing the right bird cage, perches, dishes, and other cage accessories will help your bird have a happy, healthy environment.

### Bird Cages

Bar spacing: Bigger is better as long as the spacing between the bars is narrow enough to prevent injury if the bird tries to escape. The bird's head should not be able to fit between the bars.

Bird Size	Species Examples	Recommended Bar Spacing	Recommended Perch Diameter
Small	Finch, canary, parrotlet, parakeet, lovebird	No more than 1/2"	3/8" to 3/4"
Medium	Cockatiel, conure, lory, senegal	1/2" to no more than 3/4"	5/8" to 1-1/4"
Large	African Grey, Amazon, macaw, cockatoo	3/4" to no more than 1-1/4"	1" to 2"



Cage Size: For medium to large size birds, the cage living area (does not include space between floor grate and tray floor) should be a minimum of 1-1/2 times your bird's adult wingspan in width, depth, and height. This allows comfortable movement and may reduce the risk of feather damage. For smaller birds, a cage should provide the room needed for flying.

Budgies like to move around and should have a cage that is tall and wide. Canaries and finches like to fly and should have a cage that is wide and long to allow for flight. Cockatiels need a cage that is big enough so the crest on the head and the long tail fit without being crushed. The size recommended at most pet stores is going to be the minimum size for that species of bird. Your bird will be happier with a larger, more spacious cage.

Cage Door: The door needs to be large enough to comfortably put your hand through, remove the bird, and replace the bird. The latch on the door needs to be escape-proof as the bird is going to have a lot of time to find a way to open it. Some owners place a clip or a padlock on the door of their escape artist's cage.

Cage Shape: Stick with square or rectangular cages as these are easier to clean and safer for the pet. As the number of corners in the cage increases, the flight area is decreased and the connecting edges decrease safety.

Cage Material: Metal is usually the best material as it stands up to the abuse birds give it and is easy to clean and disinfect.

Cage Bottom: A sliding bottom tray is commonly seen in bird cages. This should be easy to remove, clean, and replace with no gaps that the bird can escape through, either while the tray is removed for cleaning or while the tray is in place. Newspapers are commonly used to line the tray and should be changed daily. Do not use wood shavings or chips as they are dustier and can irritate your bird's airways.

# Cage location

Place the cage so the bird perches at about your chest level. Lower than that (especially if placed on the ground) and the bird

will be anxious and feel vulnerable. Do not place it higher than your chest level as 'higher' means 'superior' to birds. In the wild, the more dominant birds perch on higher branches. Keep the bird in a sunny, draft-free area. If the bird is more social, keep her in an area of human activity. If the bird is less social, she may be happier in a quieter area of the house.

Several furnishings are needed for the cage. These include perches, dishes, grooming supplies, nest box (depending upon species), cage cover, and toys. Make sure that when the accessories are all in the cage that the bird still has plenty of room to fly and move about without colliding with obstacles. Remember that many cage accessories will need to be replaced periodically due to chewing, constant cleaning, and regular wear and tear.

#### Perches

Birds spend the majority of their time standing on their feet so good <u>perches</u> are essential. A variety of types and sizes should be supplied. It is often recommended that each cage have a concrete perch, a natural branch perch, and a manmade perch. Choose a perch size appropriate to the size of the bird (see above table).

Concrete or mineral perches: A concrete (mineral) perch gives the bird a spot to groom his beak and nails. These may also be called grooming perches.

Branch perches: Natural tree branches are better than the wooden dowels normally supplied when the cage is purchased. Because of the uneven shape of natural branches, the bird is not always putting pressure on the same part of the foot when he stands. Most fruit and nut trees are fine to use as are ash, elm, dogwood, and magnolia. Grapevines can also be tried. Cut the branches to fit the cage, scrub and clean them well with detergent, rinse, and dry in the sun. Check for insect egg pods and remove before placing the perch in the cage or the egg pods will hatch in the cage. It is recommended to heat natural branches for 45 minutes in a 200° oven to kill any insects.

Manmade perches: Untreated cotton rope is great to use for perches. It can be tossed in the washing machine for cleaning. Monitor it closely so the bird does not eat any of the strings or catch a toe in a frayed area.

Other perch options include swings, which parakeets and some of the medium-sized birds often enjoy. As you select perches, realize that birds will chew and shred everything in the cage except the dishes and the cage itself. All other items, including perches, should be obtained knowing that birds like to chew, shred, and destroy things. As perches wear, remember to replace what he is destroying with more of the same (as long as it is safe). Plastic perches are not recommended as they are slippery and can cause medical problems if eaten. Sandpaper should not be used on the perch as it scratches the bird's feet.



Perch placement: When placing perches, locate one by the food and water dishes, one by the toys, and the concrete perch elsewhere in the cage for grooming. Place the perches so they do not inhibit bird movement or cause damage to the feathers as the bird moves around the cage. Perches should be placed so the bird's tail will not touch the side of the cage when the bird is sitting on the perch. Avoid placing perches directly over food and water dishes.

### Dishes

Dishes need to be appropriately sized for the bird. The food and water dishes need to be easy to remove and clean since this needs to be done on a daily basis. Those made out of stainless steel, crockery, or high-impact plastic are able to withstand the washing and disinfecting necessary to maintain the health of the bird. Water may be given in a dish or in a water bottle such as the type guinea pigs use. Make sure the bird knows how to use the bottle and that it is easy to remove, wash, and refill. Use a bottle brush for cleaning it. Locate food and water dishes where they will not be contaminated with droppings. Having an extra set of dishes makes cleaning easier.

## Grooming supplies

Grooming supplies include nail clippers, a sharp pair of scissors, a spray bottle for misting, and a bird bath. An ordinary plant mister and plastic dish for the bird's bath are fine but should not be used for anything else to prevent contamination.

### Nest boxes

For smaller birds, such as finches, nest boxes should be supplied for a place to hide. These boxes can be attached toward the top of the cage and should be easy to remove and clean.

#### Cage covers

Cage covers are used to signal to the bird that it is bedtime and he should be quiet. A cover made to fit the cage can be purchased. An old sheet or pillowcase will also work to cover the cage at night. A cage cover should not be used as punishment or for extended periods of time outside of sleeping hours. For larger birds that are used to handling, many people prefer to have a separate cage in a quiet room for nighttime use. Providing a quiet, dark area for sleeping is very important

since sleep deprivation can result in health and behavior problems.

#### Tovs

Toys should be plentiful and alternated. Toys are what will occupy the bird through the largest part of the day while the owners are gone. Small birds like small, lightweight toys, and tiny mirrors. Larger birds like to manipulate toys with their beak, tongue, and feet. Birds will chew their toys so choose items made from nontoxic wood or hardened plastic. Check the toys daily for damage. Rotating the toys every several days to a week will help keep the bird interested in the toys. A bored bird is at high risk for behavioral and health problems. Finding toys that are favorites will entail trial and error. Try a wide variety as long as they are safe. Locate the toys where they are easily accessible to the bird, e.g., at the end of perches. Foraging toys require birds to work for their food, giving much-needed mental stimulation, and providing a way of feeding that more closely resembles what the bird would do in the wild.

#### Sanitation

All items should be able to be <u>cleaned</u> in hot soapy water or put through the dishwasher set on the hot water cycle. Disinfecting can be done by mixing one-half cup bleach to one gallon of water. Clean and disinfect items away from

the bird, rinse thoroughly, and air-dry completely before returning the item to the cage. Do not use scented cleaners as they can be harmful to the bird's respiratory membranes.



#### Other Accessories

Other bird accessories you should consider include:

- A carrier cage for visits to the veterinarian and other travel, and/or a "sleep" cage
- A play area for the larger birds
- Bird baths, misters and showers
- Good reference books
- Air filters and humidifiers if your bird lives in an environment in which these may be necessary
- UV lighting

Owners should research each of their species to identify the specific needs for housing, feeding, and socialization. The above is a good starting point toward providing your bird with the necessities for a good life.