

## Healthy Food List for Parrots

There are a lot of safe vs toxic foods lists available for birds but did you know that many of the non-toxic foods can still be very unhealthy for your pet? This document shows a bit of a 'food pyramid' of which items should be fed the most and which should be saved for treats. There is more information and examples below.

### High Energy (treats only, best to feed on occasion)

- Corn
- Peas
- Beans (seed pod/pea part)
- Legumes/Mungbeans/Crunchy Combo
- All seeds and nuts
- Pumpkin Seeds
- Potato
- Bread
- Rice
- Pasta

Don't feed at all

### High Energy (feed small amounts daily)

- All Fruits

### Medium Energy (feed very small amounts daily)

- Sweet Potato
- Pumpkin (flesh only, seeds are very high energy)
- Carrot
- Beetroot
- Tomato
- Squash
- Snow Peas (the pea is high energy, the rest is healthy/low energy)



### Low Energy (feed at least 4 types daily, provide variety)

- |                                 |                        |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Spinach                       | • Alfalfa              |
| • Celery                        | • Cucumber             |
| • Silver beat                   | • Snow Pea Sprouts     |
| • Broccoli                      | • Brussel Sprouts      |
| • Broccolini                    | • Beetroot leaves      |
| • Rocket                        | • Cabbage              |
| • Pak Choy                      | • Wheatgrass           |
| • Buk Choy                      | • Cauliflower          |
| • Capsicum (not too many seeds) | • Kale                 |
| • Chilli (not too many seeds)   | • Zucchini             |
| • Asparagus                     | • Carrot leaves/greens |

Steer clear of Lettuce – It is not toxic but due to its' high water content, it does not have much nutritional value. **Dark** green, leafy salads/vegetables are better.

Green seeds (eg seeding grasses) are still high energy but have a lot more nutrients than dried seeds and nuts so are healthier to use as treats.

## **Toxic foods**

Avocado, Onion and Garlic are toxic for birds. Dairy products, alcohol, soft drink, salt, coffee, ANY caffeine products and chocolate are all very bad for birds and can cause health problems.

Even in small or infrequent amounts they can make your bird very sick. Some of these toxins cause organ damage that you won't see until your bird is very sick, including damaging the heart, kidneys and liver. Even a small amount of caffeine can severely compromise your birds' heart causing permanent damage and even death which can occur within minutes or many months later.

## **Dispelling some toxic food myths**

- Apple seeds do contain arsenic in very small amounts. A small bird would need to eat 50+ seeds in one sitting to do any damage and this toxin DOES NOT build up over time. Apple and apple seeds in normal amounts are considered safe.
- Cabbage is also safe and not toxic
- Asparagus is not toxic but has been reported to cause gastrointestinal upset in SOME birds. If you notice these signs, don't feed it. I personally feed it to all of my birds, on occasion, and have no issues.

## **The importance of moderating energy levels in the diets of pet birds**

Feeding a diet too high in energy can encourage breeding hormones which can lead to increased aggression, feather plucking, inappropriate nesting and other sexual behaviours including masturbation. Having pet birds in 'breeding mode' also increases the risk of reproductive problems including egg-binding, egg yolk peritonitis, prolapse (in males and females) as well as neoplasia/cancer.

Your birds' health is likely to suffer in other ways if fed a high-energy diet. A bird with an abundance of high energy, 'fatty' foods is likely to become overweight and develop heart, liver or kidney issues over time. Birds with too much energy, who fulfil their food needs quickly are prone to more destructive and vocal behaviours during the day.

Even a bird being fed a wide variety of foods with lots of greens is still likely to select their favourites (normally the least-healthy) and eat them first. Often more food is supplied than required which means the bird never or rarely eats their healthy greens and food goes to waste. By reducing the availability of high energy foods, your bird is likely to learn to eat the more healthy greens. Sometimes even their daily pellets may need to be reduced temporarily to encourage them to eat their greens.

## **The importance of moderating energy levels in the diets of breeding birds**

Most breeders will give an increased amount of high energy foods at the start of breeding season which helps to encourage pairs to reproduce and to provide enough energy to raise their chicks. It is important to continue providing a good variety of nutritious foods as well, not just fatty foods, for the ongoing health of both parents and chicks.

Hens replenish their nutrition and calcium stores in between seasons and pairs should be fed a good variety of mostly low and some medium energy foods in this time to prepare for her next clutch.



### So what should I actually be feeding my bird?

As a general rule a diet for 'granivores'\* like Budgies, Cockatiels, Galahs, Corellas & Cockatoos should consist of:

55% - 60% pellets, 30% vegetables, 10% fruit and less than 5% seed/nuts. Wherever possible 'wild foods' should be added into the diet and other items can be reduced (ideally seeds and pellets).

As a general rule a diet for 'fruitivores'\* like Conures, Quakers, Indian Ringnecks, Alexandrines, Eclectus and Macaws should consist of:

30% pellets, 50% - 55% vegetables, 15% fruit and less than 5% seed/nuts. Wherever possible 'wild foods' should be added into the diet and other items can be reduced (ideally seeds and pellets).

Quantities for Lorikeets are the same as 'fruitivores' but swap the pellets/seeds/nuts for wet and dry lorikeet food. Small pieces of nuts can be used as treats.

\*Breed list not complete, some breeds may vary slightly, please consult with your preferred **avian vet** for your bird and situation if unsure.



*A healthy fruit and vegetable 'chop' – before and after*



*Some other examples of vegetable 'chop' (Fruit has been served separately in these 2 examples, as training rewards etc)*

### What is browse or wild foods?

These are branches with leaves, flowers and seed pods from trees, locally growing. They do not need to be the breeds' native trees/foods!

The leaves, branches, flowers and seeds from the following Australian trees are safe to use: Bottle Brush, Paper Bark, Tea Tree, Gumtree/Eucalypt, Wattle, Grevillea and Ivory Curl. Hibiscus flowers are also fantastic, as are many seeding grasses and weeds. Please check the safety of unknown weeds before feeding to your bird.





*An example of some Australian Native 'browse'*



*Green Cheek Conure with a Banksia Flower*



*Ivory Curl Seeds*



*Conure & Quaker with White Bottle Brush*



*Green 'Coastal Banksia' Cones*



*Grevillea seeds*



*Lilly Pilly fruit on plant*



*Corella eating Grevillea flower*



### **A short note on seeds and the diets of wild birds.**

Dry seed is very fatty and full of carbohydrates. Feeding dry seed as a large part of your birds' diet (even when fed fruit and vegetables) can cause health issues, particularly vitamin deficiency and liver disease. Simply adding vitamin supplements does not make this a healthy diet.

Parrots in the wild eat **fresh, green** seeds and nuts, only when seasonally available. Throughout the rest of the year, foliage, flower buds and flowers make up most of their diet, with the occasional insect as well (mealworms make great treats!). Dry seed is not commonly available in the wild and is basically 'junk food'. Remember that birds in the wild spend a large amount of their day flying between food sources and therefore are very fit and active. Birds that do this amount of flying do benefit from higher energy levels. Birds that are served their food in bowls and do very little exercise, require a lot less energy.

Seeds and nuts are good to feed in very small amounts and can be used as training or foraging rewards but should not be freely available.

Sprouted seed is marginally healthier than dry seeds but is still fairly fatty.

Fresh, green seed straight from the plant contains the most nutrients. While it is still high in energy, it is much healthier than other seed options. It is easy to grow fresh millet and other varieties in pots to use as treats.



*Fresh Millet Varieties*



*'Wild Oats'*



*Green Panic Grass & Seed Head*



*(photo from Google)*