

Bird enrichment

All bird species benefit from having environmental enrichment in their housing at home. In general parrots have a larger appreciation for environmental enrichment as they are extremely intelligent and require a lot of mental stimulation to keep them from turning into grumpy, destructive pets. Many of the toys sold in pet shops are not safe for birds as they often contain cheap metal that can be toxic (ie lead or zinc) or are made of rope or fabric which can cause problems if they are eaten by your bird. If you are going to use these types of toys, please make sure your bird is not chewing on and ingesting them.

Below are some ideas of things you can do at home to add a bit of mental stimulation and fun to your parrot's life.

- Provide natural tree branches in the cage for perching – if using native foliage make sure to leave the leaves and flowers attached for extra interest. Also make sure that any branches are free of wild bird droppings. (see additional handouts for safe options)
- Provide bird toys in the cage – as mentioned earlier no string or rope toys as these can cause gastrointestinal obstructions if ingested. Wooden, stainless steel and some plastic toys are okay.

Some easy to make and use toys are listed below:

- Cat balls with bells inside – great for throwing around and making noise.
- Toilet rolls – empty or filled with treats
- Wooden pegs clipped into the side of the cage with treats attached
- Cardboard boxes with doorways cut out
- Cat litter trays filled with shredded paper with treats hidden in amongst the paper. You can also fill with the tray with your bird's favourite foods to encourage natural foraging behaviours
- Wooden hanging blocks filled with foods/treats
- Make kebab sticks (using stainless steel metal skewers) with fresh fruit and veg to hang in the cage

I find it useful to stick to a schedule and rotate through options as this minimises it not being done due to confusion or lack of time/planning.



Safety is your top concern. Most bird toy manufacturers are very vigilant regarding safety. Birds can injure themselves even on the safest toy, much like a child having an accident. Your goal is to help minimize injuries. The most common problem is getting one or more toes caught. If spaces are too big, the bird's head can get caught. If spaces are too small, toes will get caught. Check out each toy carefully for your specific bird. Stainless steel, natural non-toxic wood, rope and acrylic make great materials for toys. Indestructible toys go against a bird's nature and are boring. Birds love to destroy things. Appropriate chewable things include branches, pinecones, rawhide, natural fiber rope (under supervision), cloth and soft pine.

Soldered (contains lead) and galvanized (zinc coated) metals, such as chains, hooks, connectors and other hardware must be avoided as they are toxic. Also, avoid easily dismantled toys such as balsa wood, small link chain items, and toys with metal clips, bell clappers or those with lead weights.

Always supervise any new toys to make sure there are no accidents.

