



Feathered Companions Aviary

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CARE GUIDE FOR YOUR NEW FEATHERED COMPANION: PARROTLETS

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We want to encourage parrotlet owners to enjoy the quality of experiences possible with these avian companions.

Transitioning to a new flock

When a parrotlet reaches a new home, it may feel a bit insecure for a while. It is tempting, because you are excited to get the bird, to overwhelm it with attention. Not only is it stressed from traveling, but it is also in a totally strange place. It needs to have time to get used to its new home and to “chill out.” Read its body language! Very tight feathers with head up means stressed, but if it’s seeking to be near you, encourage that. Frequent visits, talking or singing to it in calm, reassuring vocal tones, as well as even offering a tiny treat if it will take it, will do wonders in reassuring the bird that you are its new loving flock.

Usually, within a few hours or days, the parrotlet will socialize with you and begin developing trust in the new relationship. Have everyone in the home who will be in contact with the bird visit quietly and positively, so that the bird will come to realize that everyone is a member of this new flock, not just one or two people. Since birds have a tendency to have favorites (like most animals and people), you can expect that your bird will show a preference, but you don’t want it to be a preference that excludes (with hostility) other family members. Some species are more prone to this than others, but all birds do tend to pair, so they will look to an individual in their new “flock” as their favorite.

Just like people, parrotlets have individual personalities, and some will adapt quicker than others, just as some will be cuddlier than others. While parrotlets are usually cuddly, but some are more so than others, and there may be differences in what type of contact they prefer—full body, under the wing tickling, heads only, etc. You can modify touchy-feely behavior to some extent, but you need to be patient with them and earn their trust. You have to develop your relationship with your bird with both of your personalities in mind!



Foods

Sprouting for living food

Sprouted seeds are one of the most nutritionally packed living foods a bird can eat. Mung beans are a great seed to sprout—quick and palatable, an excellent source of amino acids (building blocks of proteins), low in calories and high in nutrients, including significant amounts of vitamins C & K, folate, and antioxidants. I use a 36 or 48-hour sprout cycle, depending on how much I want them to sprout. Even with a 1/4” tail, they are nutritious! Using a sprouting jar or multi-level sprouting container is your preference.

Easy sprouting mung bean instructions for one or two birds [36 hour sprout cycle]:

- I use a pair of small sprouters (from Amazon), like in picture. You can also use sprouting jars.
- In the evening, fill sprouter to 1/2” above white bottom, put 1/4 cup mung bean seed to soak in the top of the sprouter (with a splash of bleach in the water). Replace clear lid, and cover with a dry wash cloth.
- In the morning, drain, rinse top container, put back in sprouter with lid, and cover with clear lid and cloth. Leave on kitchen counter. Rinse again at night. Rinse again in the morning and feed. You can make three day’s worth at a time, and keep 2/3 in the sprouter, and put in the refrigerator, then rinse the next morning and feed a third, and the same the next day. Start a new batch as needed, so you’ll always have sprouts ready to feed. [NOTE: A sprouting jar method can include putting the sprouts in a jar of water in the refrigerator and taking out as needed, but still rinsing daily for best preservation.]



Pellets

You can use whatever pellets you wish, or that your vet recommends, but transition to new brands gradually, if possible. Colored pellets are NOT recommended for parrotlets. Roudybush Nibbles or Crumbles, or TOPS mini-pellets seem the most palatable for most parrotlets. If you choose to feed pellets, have a separate dish for free choice so you can monitor if they are eating them.

Cooked foods

Use caution here and don't overfeed! Parrotlets usually enjoy a few bites of scrambled eggs or similar soft cooked foods, but don't leave in the cage for many hours because of potential spoilage. If I have parents feeding babies, I prefer to feed the "bird bread" which can be left during the day, and if you monitor the amount fed, it usually is all eaten by evening.



Seeds, grains, dried fruits and veggies

Parrotlets need a diet higher in proteins and fats than other birds because of their fast metabolism. You can use any good quality seed mix, and while parrotlets should have seed, a mix with no sunflower or safflower seed is often recommended, because those can foster more hyper behavior. Particularly when I am concerned about my seed source, I usually freeze seeds (not intended for sprouting) for 2 – 3 days in case those pesky seed moth eggs are in them.

"Bird Bread"

There are many variations of "bird bread" on the internet, as well as ready mixes, such as TOPS offers. I make a healthy bread with eggs, pellets, seeds, and other goodies in it. You can bake in mini-muffin pans, or like I do, in a sheet cake pan. I cut into squares and put in baggies in the freezer until needed. If you are feeding birds inside, it is usually safe to leave the bird bread in there for the day.

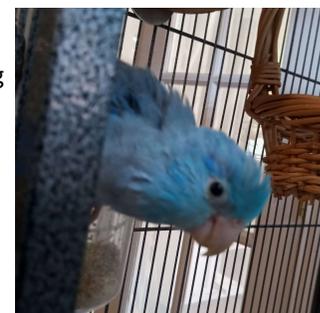


Treats

Nutriberries are good treats, as are millet sprays (which I give about once a week). Occasional training treats, like sunflower kernels or a quarter of a dry roasted unsalted peanut can be fed sparingly.

Fresh veggies and fruit

Parrotlets eat a LOT of food, and they should always have some available! Chopped fresh veggies, small and big chunks, are appreciated—to eat and to shred. I feed fresh coarse chopped veggies (in food processor) daily. Examples of veggies are kale, baby lettuce, mustard or collard greens, broccoli, etc., for greens, and carrots, squash, or cooked sweet potato for yellow/orange, and sweet peppers (banana peppers or colored peppers). I also give a small piece of fruit, usually diced apple, on top of the soft foods. Some birds like dried papaya (in moderation), and it is reputedly good for their digestion, but most of what you get in stores has sugar added, which is not good for them. A pet store sometimes has the unsugared, unsulfured type. Midday, I usually thaw a few pieces of corn/peas/carrot mix and give those.



Socializing and Environment

WARNING: Do not use air fresheners (Glade, Fabreeze, scented candles, incense, etc.) in a room where you have birds. Their respiratory systems do not handle these well, and birds have died from exposure to these products. Also, do NOT use the self-cleaning feature of your oven, because of the potential fumes, nor those bake-in bags for turkey, etc.

Housing

I prefer powder-coated cages because of ease of cleaning. Your parrotlet's cage should be large enough for it to have plenty of room to fly some in the cage. Primary concerns should be safety and containment. Be sure the bar spacing is 1/2" or less for your parrotlet, so it can't get its head through the openings. Examine feed doors and be sure a bird can't get trapped in that mechanism. Slide-up feed doors are acceptable if they have latches, OR like some of the newer medium-sized flights, one bar of the slide-up door will have wrinkle in it, which prevents a bird from opening it from the inside. You can also use a small clip or cable tie to hold the slide-up doors closed. These guys are clever, and they will find a way to raise an unsecured slide-up door!



Put various sizes of perches inside, and if your bird tends toward “stabby feet”, a small cement perch high in front (where they spend some time) will help with that. Pictured is the type I prefer, because the top is rounded and smooth, while the sides are flat and a bit rough, which can keep toenail tips filed.



Lighting

I rarely use full spectrum lights, but if you do, using them correctly is critical. There are several “full spectrum” lighting choices. A popular one is the light bar which comes with or without a timer attachment. A caution with these lights is that these can trigger hormonal behavior, so limiting the number of hours per day is wise, as is having the light at one end so the parrotlet doesn’t have sit under it all the time. The clip-on type can provide that option also. Be careful about having the light too close to eyes because eyes can be damaged by long exposure to intense lights.



Mounted On Top bolts securely onto a bird cage

Toys

Because they are intelligent, parrotlets require mental and emotional stimulation. Fortunately, through the imaginative inventions of bird-lovers, there are many wonderful bird toys on the market today. They love shredding toys! There are caveats about dangerous toys and toy parts, so you will need to research that, and above all, check the toys periodically for signs of wear, including strings that may wrap around toes, wing, or beak. Some toddler toys also make good play scapes, but be sure that there are no movable parts that can trap a foot or head. Plain baskets to play and chew on are also really appreciated by parrotlets.



Eating with you

Being social, flock creatures, your bird will likely want to sample what you’re eating. The main thing to remember is to limit salty and fatty foods, and allow no chocolate or caffeine. I also fix unsalted, unbuttered popcorn, set a bit aside for them, and then doctor the rest up for me! Also, do not let them eat from your mouth, as the human mouth has bacteria that can make a bird sick. Kissing on the beak is fine, but they sometimes try to get at your teeth or tongue, and that can expose them to bacteria which can make them very ill.



Quiet time and sleep

Your parrotlet needs a good night sleep, just like a human child, with 10 hours minimum, if possible, and having time during the day to nap. If the household is active and noisy, your bird should have enough quiet time to relax, and it’s preferable that its cage is in a corner or on a wall, rather than in the middle of a busy room. It will adapt to a busy household, but needs time to do this and still needs good quiet/sleep time. Too little rest can result in a cranky bird! You can cover the cage at night for additional privacy, but a plug-in night light is recommended to prevent “night frights.”



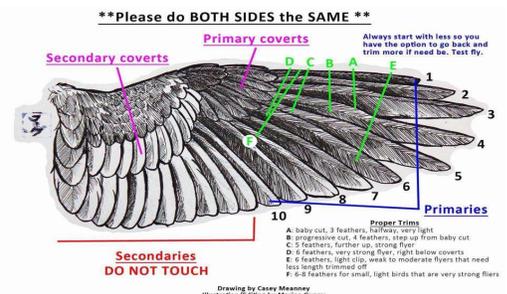
I strongly discourage allowing your bird to sleep with you! They weigh only a few ounces, and people usually weigh over 100 pounds—quite a size discrepancy! There are numerous accounts of someone rolling over on a bird in their sleep, or the bird getting caught under covers and suffocating—not worth taking a chance.

Calls

Birds call each other when not in sight, and it is normal for your parrotlet to call you in the morning, when you come home, in the evening, etc. Reassuring with a calming voice that it’s okay and you hear it, or with an excited voice when you come in and it is anxious to be with you, should minimize excessive screaming. Remember that birds are flock creatures by nature, and you are your bird’s flock! Even if it has a lot of toys in its cage, it’s not like another living creature with which to interact and, if desired by your bird, snuggle.

Wing flight feather clipping

If wing clipping is needed, I begin clipping the 2 longest flight feathers, and usually no more than 3 or 4 feathers on each side total. As your parrotlet matures and gets set in your routine (and hopefully, cooperative about going back in its cage), you can decide how much you want flight feathers clipped or if you want your bird to be full flighted. Consider the whole environment as well as your bird’s personality.



It's up to you to develop trust and safety with your parrotlet. In reality, dependence is forced upon them, but trust must be earned. ***Do not think because a bird is clipped that they cannot fly outside! All it takes is an adrenaline startle response and a breeze, and the bird can be gone! Because of the hugeness of outdoors, they easily become disoriented and may just fly until they tire and go to the ground where a predator may be waiting.***

Advantages to some flight are

- (1) They can go from one person to another easily and enjoy more mobility.
- (2) You can more easily potty-train them as they can leave and go elsewhere and then come back to you; and
- (3) When they are ready to go to bed, they will often fly right back to their cages (or to you, depending on your bedtime habits).
- (4) They develop a bit more independence and can fly to play stands or other rooms.

Disadvantages of full flight are

- (1) The danger of someone leaving an outer door open or walking outside with the bird on the shoulder and them flying away, getting disoriented with the big blue sky outdoors, or being caught in midair by a predator, such as a hawk;
- (2) Panicking and flying into a window, mirror, wall, or sliding-glass door; and
- (3) Getting into something in the house they shouldn't (e.g., a hot stove, electrical cord).
- (4) Aggression due to hormonal surges at certain times (more prevalent with males).

If they are flighted, you have to be doubly careful and aware of where they are at all times.

Shoulder sitting and behavioral issues

Parrotlets are usually content on your shoulder and/or under your hair. Yes, I do let the smaller birds on my shoulder, but that privilege can be lost if the bird persists in nipping my face (e.g., during hormonal times). Having a play stand close by can let them be near you also. Most parrotlets tend to be "beaky", particularly during hormonal flairs. They can be very stubborn and territorial during those times, and dealing with that can include less hours of lighting, time outs in cages, and even clipping 2 or 3 flight feathers to slow them down, if necessary. Soothing music, humming softly, and generally toning down your own emotions seem to help. They sense when you are agitated, and their negative emotions can escalate too!

Potty training

Start early, watch your bird's body language for when it needs to poop, and reinforce going in a particular place. You can use a phrase (e.g., go potty, go poop) and praise them when they do. Smaller birds, like parrotlets, have a bit higher metabolism than the larger birds and go more often, so they tend to be more difficult to potty train.

Helpful books and publications

There are many books these days which have excellent information, e.g., soft books, such as *Good Bird* (Heidenreich) and *Birds for Dummies* (Speer and Spadafori). There are also a number of helpful websites pertaining to small parrots such as parrotlets. These are also very useful in dealing with behavior issues and relationship enrichment! Links to educational articles and web sites can also be found at birdcompanions.com/Parrotlets.html.

Our Facebook page is: Feathered Companions Aviary.

"Some say they don't believe that Angels can be seen or heard. What a shame such blindness, what a pity such deafness, when the Song of Songs abounds and heaven's flyers are all around, only thinly disguised ... as birds." (Author unknown)

