



# Cage Guide

From choosing a cage to setting it up

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# Cage Materials

KEEPING YOUR PARROT SAFE



**AVOID HEAVY METAL POISONING!** Did you know that certain metals are toxic to birds? Heavy metal poisoning causes sickness and can even be fatal if left untreated. Choosing the right cage for your bird starts with making sure the cage is made of parrot-safe materials. This doesn't just apply to the metal structure of the cage, but also to the finish used!

## UNSAFE

Steel

Iron

Unweathered galvanized metal

Situationally: weathered galvanized metal (heavy chewers)

## SAFE

Stainless steel

Aluminum

Undamaged nickel plated steel

Situationally: weathered galvanized metal (observe bird's behavior)

**FINISHES.** Powder coated bird cages have become more popular due to their nicer appearance and often cheaper cost. Though powder coatings can typically withstand a significant amount of force, they can chip, which can lead to ingestion of the coating. Additionally, powder coatings are typically used to coat metals that are not parrot safe. As such, chips in the coating can expose your parrot to potentially toxic metals. Luckily, having the powder coating redone on a cage is simple and relatively inexpensive. We recommend checking your cage regularly for chips in the powder coating. Painting a cage, even with parrot-safe paint, is not recommended as the paint can be easily chipped and ingested. Antique bird cages should always be avoided as they may contain lead-based paint and/or toxic metal.



# Galvanized Metal

## UNDERSTANDING THE CONTROVERSY



**WHAT IS GALVANIZED METAL?** Galvanizing is the process of coating iron or steel with zinc so as to prevent galvanic corrosion (mainly, rust). Aviculturists have used high quality galvanized wiring for years and generally report it as safe. Galvanized wiring *can* be safe for use around parrots due to the “weathering” process, or repeated wet/dry cycles, which results in the initially applied zinc coating turning into an insoluble, stable zinc patina (zinc carbonate). This zinc patina is formed over time first by zinc oxide reacting with water to form zinc hydroxide. Zinc hydroxide, which has a white powder-like appearance, is often seen on the surface of newly galvanized materials, is highly soluble, and can be toxic if ingested in large enough quantities. However, zinc hydroxide can react with carbon dioxide in the air to form zinc carbonate, which is highly insoluble, stable, and protects the underlying metal from corrosion.

**WHAT DOES NERDY BIRD COLLECTIVE RECOMMEND?** For indoor enclosures that would not be allowed to naturally weather, we recommend choosing aluminum or stainless steel cage, or a cage coated with a parrot-safe finish. If you choose to construct your own enclosure using galvanized metal, we recommend coating with a parrot-safe finish (such as powder coating). Even if your outdoor galvanized metal enclosure is allowed to naturally weather, unevenly textured spots can be broken off and ingested, or the coating itself can become chipped by heavy chewers, potentially leading to toxicity. As such, we recommend observing your bird’s behavior in the enclosure to determine if they are interacting with materials in an unsafe way (e.g., heavily chewing, licking, etc.).



# Cage Size

## DIMENSIONS AND BAR SPACING



When it comes to choosing a cage size, bigger is usually better! There are always exceptions (for example, a bird with limited mobility may actually benefit from a smaller enclosure, a larger one may even be unsafe). Other factors to consider are how much time your bird spends in their cage, how they spend their time in their cage (e.g., sleeping, foraging, etc.), and if they share the space with other birds. In any case, your bird should be able to comfortably stretch their wings and have freedom of movement. The below table, adapted from one by the Association of Avian Veterinarians, offers some guidance; however we want to stress that smaller birds can greatly benefit from larger enclosures.

Proper bar spacing is **ESSENTIAL** to providing a safe cage!  
Improper bar spacing can lead to anything from your bird escaping  
between bars to significant injury.

SPECIES	CAGE SIZE	BAR SPACING
Small parakeets, parrotlets, cockatiels,	27" x 24"	Up to 1/2"
Conures, large parakeets, poicephalus,	32" x 23"	5/8" to 3/4"
African greys, small cockatoos, eclectus, amazons, and small macaws	36" x 28" or 48" x 36"	3/4" to 1"
Large cockatoos and medium macaws	64" x 32"	1" to 1.25"
Extra large macaws	80" x 40"	1" to 1.25"

Table adapted from: *Minimum cage size recommendations - aav.org. Association of Avian Veterinarians. (2019, April 23). Retrieved February 4, 2022, from <https://www.aav.org/blogpost/1778905/322568/Minimum-Cage-Size-Recommendations>*



# Cage Shape

WHY SOME SHAPES WORK BETTER THAN OTHERS



There are so many styles of cages out there, so which should you choose? Generally speaking, birds do not do well in rounded cages, so it's best to stick to cages with flat wall panels. Birds are natural climbers and fully rounded cages can suppress climbing. Additionally, it can be difficult to attach perches to round cages. Lastly, round cages are typically only offered in very small sizes. For these reasons, we are not fans of round cages. The below drawings are a few examples of a common cage shapes we recommend.



Dome top



Standard flight



Play top



# Perches

## THINKING ABOUT SIZE AND MATERIALS



Selecting the right types of perches is equally as important as selecting the cage itself! Providing perches with a variety of textures can promote foot health.

**ABOUT DOWEL PERCHES:** Dowel perches (the perfectly round ones that come with most cages) aren't inherently unsafe, but can lead to foot problems when overused. To prevent your parrot's feet from getting weak and/or developing sores (called bumble foot), we encourage you to choose different perches that challenge your bird's feet in one way or another.

**DIAMETER:** The diameter of the perch should be big enough so that your bird's front and back toenails do not touch each other when your bird is perched. When in doubt, go for the larger diameter perch. Smaller birds like budgies and cockatiels often enjoy having larger diameter perches, too!

**MATERIALS:** There are so many different perch materials to choose from, so how are you supposed to choose? On the next few pages, we'll take you through different types of perches, which ones are safe, and which ones you may want to be cautious of. Throughout this next section, try to keep in mind your bird as an individual, as a "safe" perch material for one bird may be problematic for another. In other words, "safe" and "unsafe" in this section are subjective labels.



# Wood Perches

BRANCHES AND MORE!



## NATURAL WOOD BRANCHES

Natural parrot-safe wood branches are our favorite! Perches made of hard woods such as manzanita and java are very well suited for perches that last longer, especially for larger parrots, but we also recommend providing softer wood perches! Remember, perches can be toys, too.

## WOODEN SWINGS

Why not add a little bit of an extra challenge to your natural wood branches and turn them into a fun swing? Though we do absolutely love regular perches, the way they are secured to the cage typically prevents them from bouncing or otherwise moving around. We want perches attached to cage walls to be secure for safety reasons, so swings are a great addition if you'd like your bird to experience more movement.

## FLAT PERCHES

Flat perches, such as corner perches, allow for your bird to fully stretch out their feet. Plus, they provide an extra surface in the cage for fun activities like foraging!



# Other Perches

## BOINGS, SWINGS, AND GROOMING PERCHES

### BOINGS & ROPE PERCHES

Boings are so much fun and constantly challenge your bird's balance and grip while providing a nice soft surface for their feet. In general, rope perches can provide relief for tired feet or for birds with arthritis. Due to the dangers of frayed cotton fibers, such as crop impaction, you should observe your bird's behavior with boings and rope perches to see if they interact with them in a dangerous way (e.g., chewing). Providing boings and other rope perches made of materials that do not fray like cotton, such as twine or sisal, can reduce the risk of fiber ingestion/crop impaction.



### GROOMING PERCHES

Sand-coated or cement perches can be somewhat helpful in keeping your parrot's nails from getting too sharp, but they can also cause foot sores if they are the only type of perch in the cage or are the perch used most frequently. As such, we recommend using these perches sparingly and placing them in areas of the cage that are visited less frequently. Some birds may rub their beak excessively on sandy or cement perches, causing their beak to be worn down too much. If you observe this behavior with your bird, it may be best to refrain from offering these types of perches at all.



# Enrichment

## TOYS AND FORAGING OPPORTUNITIES

**WHY PROVIDE TOYS?** Toys are one of the ways we can enrich our bird's life both inside and outside of the cage. Providing your bird with an assortment of toys that challenge them in various ways can help keep your bird engaged, prevent boredom, and foster independence.



**WHAT KIND OF TOYS SHOULD I PROVIDE?** Some birds are shredders, some prefer destroying blocks of wood, some will spend hours trying to figure out a puzzle toy, and some like a little bit of everything. There are many bird toy companies you can directly purchase from, or you can even make your own! Although toys are an important and enriching part of your bird's cage setup, make sure that you are not restricting your bird's movement by overcrowding the cage with too many toys. Whatever toys you choose, make sure they are parrot-safe! On the next page, we'll go over a few safety considerations.

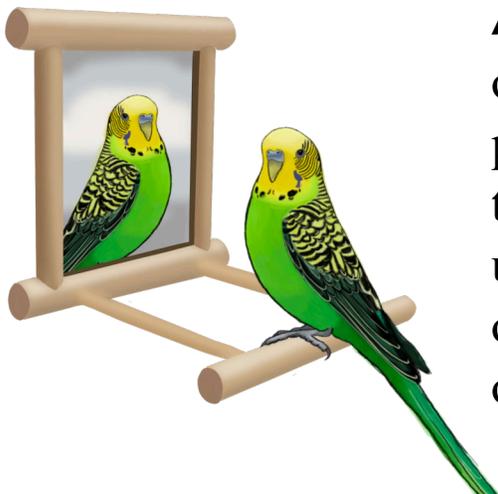
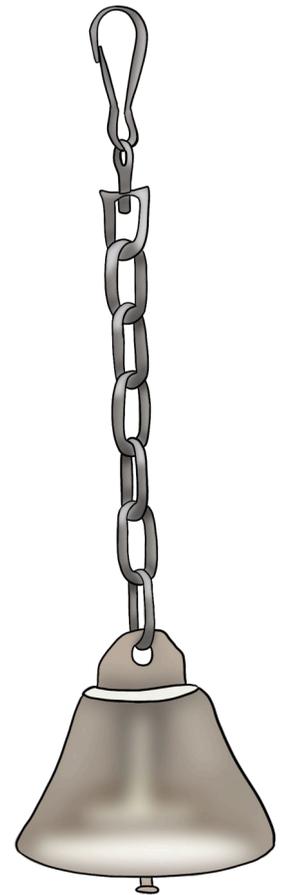


# Toy Safety

## MATERIALS AND SECURING



**SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:** Watch out for unsafe metals, metal pieces that can be easily removed (ingestion and choking hazards), pinch points (common in chains), and metal parts that can pierce the skin or beak (can occur from chains with open links and certain clips/carabiners). Regularly checking toys and how they are secured can help prevent accidental injury. For securing toys to cages, we prefer D-shaped stainless steel locking quick-link carabiners (top of page) and recommend avoiding split key rings, snap hooks, spring loaded clips, and carabiners that can be easily unlocked. The bell to the right has a few potential hazards, including easily removable metal parts (ingestion/choking hazard), a chain (make sure links are unable to be opened so as to not pierce skin/beak and that size is appropriate for species to prevent toe injuries), and a snap hook. The reflective surface and/or sound from bell also may be overstimulating (see below).



**A NOTE ABOUT MIRRORS:** Though mirror (or other reflective surface) toys may not inherently pose a safety risk, we generally do not recommend them as they can lead to overstimulation and undesired behaviors. Regurgitation, nesting, and other behaviors associated with reproduction are often triggered by these types of toys.

