

Parrot Foods and Feeding

Category: Companion Parrot Feeding

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I approach healthy foods and feeding from the perspective of foraging and simplicity. This benefits the budget as well as the companion parrot. Consider your companion from the native wild side. Google up some searches on their wild cousins and what foods they eat. I'll use Felix as an example for this thought. Being an African Grey, the foods profile tends toward leaves, bark, young plant growth, snails, available nuts, seeds and flowering fruits. Simple enough. Or how about Kirby our Indian Ringneck Parakeet extraordinaire! Seeds, grasses, young flowering growth, vegetation, flowers, the occasional bug.

What every parrot has in common in the wild they have in common in the companion setting; food is not only about eating but about employment and work. There are no bowls in the wild. There are no chopped anything waiting for easy consumption. One of the lost arts, or maybe it was never really an art, is feeding our companions for employment's sake. Bowls are great, chop is awesome and laying out banquets of organics is a wonderful thing. But let's remember that companion parrots enjoy the process of eating and discovering things to eat. It's in their DNA as much as flight.

Chop is trending hard and strong in the companion world. Chop delivers in the parental satisfaction category. Who wouldn't be proud and feel good about serving chop to their parrots. It's full of nutrition and delicious. Chop is a great idea all in all. Powerful in transitioning a parrot off cheap seeds and into the realm of healthy eating as well. But chop has some downfalls.

Chop completely bypasses the need for a parrot to work for their dinner, to forage, and to explore. Chop masks texture, flavor and identity of foods as well. Most chop failures occur because of these three points. The finer the chop, the harder it is to identify what is being offered. Flavors mix to create one profile of pulps, which can turn off some parrots. Apple doesn't taste like apple and romaine doesn't taste like romaine. And yes, I do believe parrots taste food. Chop that is frozen and thawed, will immediately begin to degrade and breakdown. The nutritional values and structure loss speeds up in the decomp processes once it hits the oxygen in the air. If they don't get it or on it within the hour things get mushy. That's great if a parrot likes mush, but if not, all that frozen chop just lost it's appeal. Extreme chop, with many components tend to create a situation where the odds go up in rejection because the reject-able items were increased. And you'll never know what the offense was because of the mixed flavor, texture and item profile. So many variables to turn a parrot off are there and so many are left to cypher for the parent.

The best practice for chop; keep it simple and under 4 items. Keeping the items short listed allows you to cypher what wasn't working and remove that one offender. Or you can limit the chop to a family of foods; lettuces, fruits, green veggies etc. Again, this will allow a taste profile that is easily cyphered. Keep it fresh and created the day of serving. The very component of chop, food being chopped up, makes freezing it's achilles heal.

What of pellets? I like to keep our pellet ratio at less than 20% offered, which, after rejection to the floor leaves about 10% consumed. Read the label. If your pellet's first ingredients are anything related to corn, wheat or soy, understand those ingredients are GMO affected. Without fail. These are the least expensive way to create the binder for vitamins and fats. That's why they're used. It is the same process for dry dog foods. Check for sugars. They'll be in there under their copious naming. You don't want empty calories. Pellets are processed foods. Organic, holistic or no, they are processed, so find that brand that provides the simplest format of ingredients and find that balance. There are good products that walk the mid-ground of provisions. You'll give up something to get another in pellets. I do suggest reading the labels and consider how you are going to provide nutritionally dense calories. And consider how you will offset what the pellets aren't giving your bird with wholefoods. Personally, I lean heavy on whole foods, dried fruits, raw nuts, high value seeds, then pellet mixes. And yes, we share our dinners as well.

Foraging and dinner time. Skewering fruits and veggies, placing bowls of foods in different places, wrapping morsels in foraging papers, boxes and toys, and simply handing a big parrot an apple are all legitimate avenues. For the record I do not fear apple seeds, the data doesn't support the fear. Unless you are offering a couple tablespoons of apple seeds a day, and they eat every one, it's just a non starter of a food fear. Our macaws love being handed a whole cucumber, mandarin orange, apple, summer squash, winter squash etc. I let them figure it out. That's the idea of it. Smaller parrots need smaller options, cut in half or quarter or just miniature sized. Whole sweet peppers are a hit across the board in our flock.

What about imported foods from other countries? Pesticides and differing laws globally make things tricky to be sure. Are grapes from Chili dangerous? I don't know. I purchase grapes as local as possible and when necessary I do buy dark grapes from Chili. From a local major grocery store. I know grocery vendors differ from grocery store to grocery store according to price point. I do know that buying local and small grower works out better than big box and cheap trucked in. I do know some foods are no longer even grown in the US due to many reasons. Food is changing and where and how it is produced is no longer decided by the nutritional value, but on the cost per kilo and profit per shipment. Food is a commodity. Palm Oil was the big thing for a while, until it was revealed palm oil demand is leading to the destruction of native parrot habitats. Ironic isn't it. Food is personal on many different levels.

You do not have to spend hundreds of dollars and hours of time to successfully nurture and feed your companion parrots. You do not have to stress and worry about food origin if you keep it simple, fresh and local. Don't ever feel you aren't living up to your parrot's food needs because you can't afford the time or money for kale or quinoa. Good old broccoli, apples, almonds and flax seeds, veggie pasta and such get the job done just as well. Feeding our parrots should be enjoyable, gratifying and a shared moment of kindness.

Together we can give every parrot everywhere, a happy home!

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