

# Diet of Small Ground-Foraging Parrots

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(e.g., budgies, cockatiels, grass parakeets)

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## Recommended Diet:

For most pet psittacines (parrots) I recommend a diet consisting of:

- 80% formulated commercial diet (e.g., "pellets" such as Zupreem, Harrison's Adult Lifetime, Lafebers, Roudybush, Kaytee, etc. OR a hulled seed/formulated matrix diet such as Lafeber Nutriberries).
- 20% fresh vegetables and greens. These can be presented cooked or raw. Good options include kale, leaf lettuce, peas, sweet potato, squash, green beans, cauliflower, broccoli. Avoid high starch items such as potato or corn.
- A small amount of seed or nut fragments, presented as a reward from your fingers or from a foraging toy, NOT for "free" in a dish.

If your bird does not already eat pellets, you must transition their diet very carefully. This is especially important for small birds (e.g., conures, cockatiels, budgies and smaller). Below are guidelines for your species:

## Steps for Diet Conversion

1. **Separate food:** During this introduction period, offer pellets in a separate bowl from the old diet. Don't mix pellets and seed together as it will encourage them to dig under the pellets and waste more food. Also, I recommend feeding the smallest size of pellet available, usually the type made for budgerigars (parakeets). Small crumbs and morsels are usually more attractive for exploration of new foods.
2. **Daily food familiarization sessions:** If your bird is not very tame or tends to fly around a lot, it's advised to trim their wings to help them stay with you during these sessions. Spread a small towel on a table, sprinkle some of the pelleted diet out, and place your bird in the center. Use your hand to simulate a bird scratching, pecking, and eating the food. Crunch them in your fingernails or flick them around gently. This will encourage your bird to try them also. **Do this daily** as it must be seen as a routine flock activity.
3. **Trial Period:** Once your bird is eating the pellets during these familiarization sessions, you can try removing the old diet for a day. Change the papers at the bottom of the cage and remove the dish used for the old diet. If they eat the pellets then you will see formed droppings in the bottom of the cage, even if it's unclear if they are actually eating the pellets. The droppings may be larger and lighter in color than when on seed. Additionally, food colorings, if present, may be seen (orange coloration for example in Zupreem pellets).

4. **Keep Going!:** If they pass the trial period day then you can keep going with just pellets and vegetables/greens. If they do not eat then the droppings will be smaller with white urates and tiny, dark, poorly formed feces. If this occurs, offer the old diet again and keep doing your daily familiarization exercises. Sometimes it takes days or weeks of persistence so don't give up!
5. **Treats/Training:** Tiny fragments of nuts or small seeds can still be used as rewards for good behavior or trick training. They will be much more valuable to your bird if they are not part of the everyday diet. For most birds, this should equate to no more than a couple of grey-stripe sunflower seeds, an almond sliver, or half of a single peanut.