

WELCOMING your new bird home

Picking a bird is fun and exciting for you, but it can be a scary process. Make the transition as smooth as possible by preparing for his arrival.

Preparing for the big day

Once you decide what kind of bird you'll adopt, pick out a comfy home for your feathered friend, including a roomy cage and plenty of toys.

Birds love to be near the action, so set up his home in a quiet place near a family area—but make sure it's not close to the bathroom or kitchen.

These areas often harbor dangerous fumes from household cleaners or nonstick cookware. Place the cage away from heating or cooling vents, radiators, fireplaces, or windows—rapid temperature and humidity changes will stress your pet.

The first few days

Bring your bird home on a quiet day. He's not ready to meet people, so let him enjoy his own company and his new surroundings for a few days. Feed him regularly, and don't forget to cover his cage—he needs at least 10 hours of darkness to nap.

Your bird enjoys quiet companionship, so talk softly, read to him, and watch television nearby. Let him get used to your presence before you handle him. But don't worry—he'll be eating from your hand in no time.

During turbulent times, many of us turn to comfort foods—and birds are no exception. So feed your pal his normal chow for the first week. If you want to change his diet, do so gradu-



ally. And keep the area around your bird's cage quiet. You can sweep up the litter beneath his cage, but resist the urge to run the vacuum.

Making introductions

Your bird needs several days to explore his new environment without stress, so keep children, company, and other pets away.

When he seems pre at ease, allow children to move quietly around the cage, talk softly, sing, and tell stories—they can learn to handle your bird later. Slowly introduce other pets, and never leave the bird alone or unsupervised with a dog or cat.

Before your pet meets the rest of your feathered family, he needs a visit to the veterinarian. Even healthy looking birds can carry deadly diseases, so isolate your bird for 60 to 90 days, wash your hands after handling him, and store his cage supplies separately.

For small birds, offer them adjoining rooms—place their cages side by

side for about a month so they can chat. If they get along, try placing them in one cage for a few hours. As long as they don't squabble over dirty dishes or who gets the biggest perch, you can leave them in the same cage.

Proceed more slowly when introducing larger birds. After a month in the same neighborhood, open the cage doors and let them gossip in the doorways or on top of the cages. If this works, place them together in a neutral play area. Large birds can injure each other quickly, so if one of your feathered friends acts out, throw a towel over him—you don't want to get caught in the cross fire.

Pets who get along can move in together as long as they don't act territorial—you'll still need to watch them closely, though, the first few weeks. If your pets can't play together nicely, don't force them to be friends.

With or without a roommate, your bird will settle right in and become a vocal member of the family.