

Choosing a cage for your bird

Here are a few things to keep in mind to make sure your bird's new home is safe for her and convenient for you.

Spreading her wings

Pick the largest cage that's appropriate for your bird. A good guideline: The cage's length and width should be at least one and a half times her wingspan. Whether your bird's hobbies include flitting from perch to perch or scaling the steep slope of her cage wires, she'll appreciate the elbowroom. And you don't want to damage your pet's precious plumage, so make sure her tail feathers fit comfortably.

Just because a cage is labeled for your bird's breed doesn't mean it's a good choice. These cages usually offer the minimum amount of room your pet needs, so buy at least one size larger.

Avoid tall narrow cages—these inhibit most birds' natural movement. Circular cages reduce flying space and are a nuisance to fit with cage papers. Your best bet: A simple square cage.

In a pinch

The bars of your pet's cage should be close enough that your clever cockatiel can't poke her head through, but far enough apart so they don't trap or pinch her toes, wings, or beak. Vertical bars are easier on tail feathers, and horizontal bars are easier to climb.

Building a better birdhouse

Unless you own a finch or canary, avoid wood or bamboo houses. You can't disinfect these cages, and parrots can chew them to toothpicks. Acrylic cages

provide a clear view and protect your floor, but they don't offer adequate ventilation or a place to climb.

Metals, such as stainless steel, cold-rolled steel, brass, aluminum, and galvanized wire or iron, make solid safe cages. The wires should be strong with a nontoxic finish that withstands disinfectants and chewing without corrosion or chipping. Beware of older cages that are painted with poisonous lead-based paint, and choose electroplated rather than dipped galvanized metals to prevent excessive zinc

ingestion—and poisoning. Cages painted with a powder coat are durable, easy to clean, and come in attractive colors.

The bottom line

A wire grid or grate above the floor will protect your bird from old droppings or spoiled food, and it also keeps

her from shredding cage papers or escaping when the cage tray's not in place. Removable floor trays allow easy daily paper changes and should accommodate standard papers and newspapers.

Safety first

Look for other safety features. Choose a solid stable cage with no exposed sharp edges, and make sure all welds, joints, and seams are sturdy and smooth. Tighten all nuts and bolts, and make sure the hardware's out of your precocious pet's reach. Some habitats also sport cage stands, seed guards or skirts, casters, and extra food and water ports.

Your next step: Pick the accessories that will turn your bird's roomy cage into a comfy new home.

