



A TOY TO CLIMB ALL OVER

HANGING & GYM TOYS

by Desi Milpacher, World Parrot Trust

One of the more entertaining yet necessary things for a companion parrot to do, is to climb. Climbing is one thing that birds do well, besides flying.

Climbing is observed in foraging, mating, escaping, playing – nearly everything a parrot does, every day, in the natural world. And so it makes sense to try and replicate the conditions for climbing, hanging and performing other acrobatic moves to engage, exercise and mentally stimulate your companion bird.

A simple rule to think of: if a person can entice a parrot with a favourite food or toy item - subtly exploiting its natural curiosity - it may be willing to climb for it, increasing its exercise load. Simple or complex toys alike can achieve this.

Engaging a companion parrot in climbing activities can also be an enjoyable 'exercise' for caregivers!

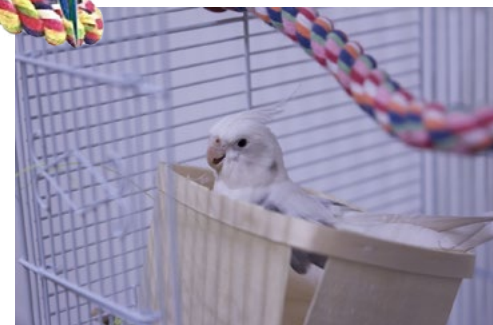
GET CREATIVE

With a little bit of ingenuity (and common sense) a person can create play areas for his/her parrot that will delight, entertain and engage.

FOR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STIMULATION TRY THESE IDEAS:

- **Natural browse:** Great as climbing perches (ensure they're thick enough to support your bird's weight) or use with food and toy items hanging from it, hide things and food so they have to go searching. Use unsprayed, untreated and well-cleaned branches of bird safe plants such as grapevine, Saskatoon, willow, seagrass rope, natural raffia.
- **Leaf bathing with suspended leaves:** Many species like budgerigars and caiques love to bathe by rubbing themselves on wet leaves, as they would do in the wild. Use leaves of chard, kale and other greens for this (bonus: they also make a nutritious snack!) Weave into wire of cage or into other browse so they climb to get them.
- **Swings, boings and bungees** (*shapeable, wire-enforced rope*): Suspended from cage ceilings, room ceilings or from play gyms. They will move under the bird's weight in unpredictable ways as they are used, which makes them fun for climbing, hanging and encouraging balance.
- **Play stands, gyms and perches:** Make from natural bird-safe wood or PVV pipe. Suspend toys and food items to stimulate interest. (*May wish to avoid use of messy food items with wood stands, as they can be difficult to clean.*)
- **Ropes, climbing nets:** Use bird safe (untreated) rope, Get a Grip™ or other brand climbing nets to create suspended activity areas around the room. Attach toys at intervals to create areas of interest and encourage movement.
- **Ladders and ramps:** Commercial hard plastic, wood, or flexible ones made of rope. Use to create interesting play areas.
- **Wooden clothes-drying rack** (*unstained, unpainted*): A quick and easy parrot gym! Deck out with favourite toy items to encourage climbing from dowel to dowel.
- **Build an outdoor aviary!** Hang favourite and familiar items, plants, swings, boings, ropes and all the rest and let your bird explore while getting fresh air and sunshine.

Always supervise the use of toys to ensure no injuries occur.



HAVE FUN, BE SAFE

It is our responsibility as parrot caregivers to provide everything that a companion bird needs to be challenged – to be physically and mentally healthy – and to do it in a safe and interesting way that will benefit all involved.

Always supervise the use of toys to ensure no injuries occur.

SAFETY TIPS

- Never leave a parrot out of its cage unattended unless the area is 100% bird-proofed. Unattended parrots can make short work of door frames, flooring, windowsills, etc many of which can be toxic materials.
- It's best to keep parrots out of the kitchen, but if that's not possible, take extra care of the many hidden dangers: toxic fumes from non-stick cookware, cleaners, burn injuries from landing on stovetops, boiling water/steam burns, etc.
- Never leave a parrot unattended where there's open water - even tall glasses of water can be dangerous! Take extra care around open sinks, tubs and toilets.
- Check all new toys first for places to get legs, toes and heads caught, inspect hanging and foot toys daily to ensure rope is not fraying, loops appearing or parts breaking down.
- Place play stations/perches out of the main traffic area of the room, away from drafts and direct sunlight particularly if bird is clipped and cannot relocate itself if uncomfortable.
- Watch out for general dangers such as other pets, ceiling fans, heat registers / radiators, furnace vents, open windows, open doors, fireplaces, etc.
- Use stainless steel quick links - the *screw-clasp type* to attach toy and browse items to ceilings and cage wire, as the spring-loaded clasps can trap toes and beaks.

