



HIDE AND SEEK... FORAGING AND PUZZLE TOYS

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Anyone who has had a companion bird for a length of time will tell you that keeping that bright and inquiring mind occupied is an almost continuous job. A fun one, but continuous!

Parrots in the wild spend a good deal of their time seeking: food, shelter, roosting areas, nest sites, and company.

Parrots in captivity must somehow make up for the lack of opportunity for all of these natural inclinations, and it is up to us, their caregivers, to fill in the gaps.

Foraging and puzzle toys are activities that can keep them busy - and hopefully out of trouble! Here are a few ideas you can try out to keep your feathered ones happy.

**A parrot
is built -
mentally
and physically
- for foraging.**



NATURAL BROWSE AND OTHER ITEMS

A natural toy item is a great fit for a bird historically used to being in the wild. Safety rules apply, for both toxicity and physical dangers such as barbs and spines. Also, in general, make sure the wood has not been exposed to exhaust fumes, rot, mould, wild animal droppings or insects.

IDEAS FOR NATURAL ITEMS

- Branches: fir, pine, saskatoon, willow, aspen, sycamore, alder, beech, oak, pear, apple, spruce, beech, ash, elm, hawthorn, poplar or grapevine. *(All should be unsprayed, sap and needle-free).* Heat sterilize in an oven at 250F for an hour, or use grapefruit seed extract (GSE) or vinegar to scrub clean, then dry in hot sun (UV rays will help to sterilize, too).
- Use shrubs like saskatoon and apple when in bloom and let the birds pick the blossoms off.
- Safe plants such as spider, jade, pony-tail palm, Swedish ivy, petunia, snap dragon, and nasturtium. Ensure potted plants do not develop mould in the soil. GSE solution (10-15 drops per gallon) used to water the plants every two to three weeks can help prevent this. Keep birds out of soil, and ensure the pot itself is made of bird-safe materials.
- Leafy vegetables (kale, endive, edible flowering cabbage, carrot tops, corn cob, dandelion, chickweed) are chewable, and also nutritious. Can be interwoven through cage wire, tied in with other foraging branches or included in with existing toys.
- Plant oat, wheat, rye and other 'cat grasses' in indoor (or outdoor) pots for grazing. *(Cover soil with mesh or drop one pot into a deeper one to keep parrots from eating the soil.) TIP: Letting the wild grasses go to seed in the yard can be a valued treat for the littlest ones!*
- Pine or spruce cones: these are favourites of many birds. Be sure to find ones that are as clean and free of debris as possible. Scrub well and heat sterilize at 200F for 45 minutes, shut off oven and let cool for two hours while still in oven. When ready to use, stuff favourite food items or other chewable toys in cones for foraging fun.

Always
ensure you
know exactly
what species
of plant you
are using.



IT'S A PUZZLER

Parrots are curious about most things. This is a trait that is present from youngster onwards, and is key to a parrot's overall education about its environment. Part of this education is learning how to solve simple problems, such as opening a palm nut and extracting its contents. This activity is puzzle solving of a sort.

Companion parrots have the same curiosity. They need to be able to express this inquisitiveness and to learn, and can do so with puzzle toys that challenge them.

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

IDEAS FOR DIY PUZZLE TOYS

- Simply filling a box with chewables and non-destructible items can make an effective puzzle toy, mixing the two together in a big jumble, and then having your parrot search through for its favourites. (A partitioned plastic box can be used the same way, by putting similar items in each section for the parrot to choose.)
- Add treats to unbleached, basket-style coffee filters and tie ends closed with sisal or raffia.
- Set up a bowl of clean, polished display stones with toys, nuts and other food items mixed in for them to find.
- Balling up unbleached or brown paper wrap and tucking in food items or treasured toys can provide stimulation.
- Unwaxed paper cups or sturdy bowls can be used to hide food items amongst non-destructible toys. (Cover tops with paper to make it more of a challenge.)
- Paper coin wrappers (clean, unused) can be stuffed with chewable toys or food items, then the ends twisted together for a simple puzzle.
- And of course there are countless parrot-safe foraging toys available from reputable shops.

TIP: To make a forage box a bit more challenging, cover the box with unbleached paper, tie on with paulie, sisal or seagrass rope, slit a hole in the top so the bird can see what's inside and let him rip it open to get at the toys/goodies!



GET CREATIVE, BE SAFE

These are just a few of the countless ideas to help keep your parrot companion happy and stimulated. Be inventive, but always consider your pet's safety first.