

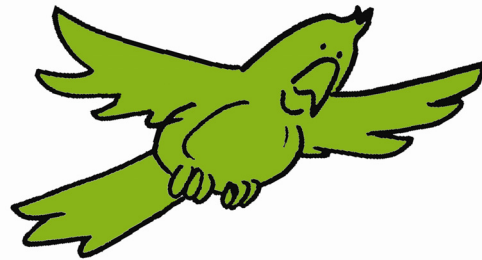
Perches for your Bird

In nature, most birds perch in trees or on lofty structures. Birds avoid most predators (except other birds) by their ability to fly. When they're not flying, birds are perched high above predators, out of harm's way. Perches, therefore, help a bird feel safe. The higher the perch, the safer he'll feel. In addition to helping your bird feel safe, the perches in his cage provide him with exercise as he climbs, hops or flies from perch to perch.

Manufactured Perches

Manufactured perches are available in wood, mineral and plastic, and in different sizes and shapes. Following is a summary of the various types available:

- Wood perches. Generally made of a hardwood dowel, wood perches may be round, oval or square. Because many birds chew wooden perches, these may need to be replaced periodically.
- Mineral perches. Mineral perches are helpful in wearing down the nails and beaks of birds, preventing them from becoming overgrown. These perches are also comfortable and relatively indestructible. They come in a variety of shapes, materials and combinations of materials.
- Plastic perches. Plastic perches are not recommended, because the plastic can hurt a bird's feet.



Natural Perches

Nature has designed the ideal perch: Branches automatically come in the varied sizes and shapes that provide healthy perching for your bird.

- Cut branches. If you have birch, willow or fruit trees in your backyard, and you are absolutely certain that these have not been sprayed with a pesticide, you may safely cut branches as perches for your bird. Otherwise, use extreme caution in introducing branches to your bird. The branches may have been sprayed with a harmful pesticide or they may be of a type that is toxic to birds (e.g., hemlock or yew).
- Commercial natural perches. Rather than risking the health of your pet, you should purchase commercial branch perches for your bird (e.g., Manzanita perches).

Perch Size

You should provide your bird with a variety of shapes and sizes to provide exercise for his feet. It is not healthy for his feet to be constantly clutched in the same position, which will happen if he is using perches of only one size or shape. A perch that can be totally encircled by your bird's foot so that his toes overlap is too small. On the other hand, your bird should be able to get his foot at least three-quarters of the way around the perch. Note also that some finch species do not roost on perches, and require a nest for roosting.

Some Cautions on Perches

- Number of perches. Although it's a good idea to have several perches of different sizes and shapes to provide exercise for your bird as he navigates from perch to perch, do not have so many perches as to interfere with his ability to exercise. Observe your bird closely to determine if this is happening. Positioning of perches. Never position perches over feeding or drinking dishes, directly over one another or so close to the sides of the cage that your bird's tail rubs against the bars. For birds such as finches and canaries, it is best to position perches toward the ends of the cages to permit greater space for flight.
- Sandpaper perches. Do not purchase sandpaper perches--the sand on them may cut your bird's feet. If you're using sandpaper perch covers for your perches, make sure no more than 25 percent of the perch is covered. Instead, concrete or mineral perches are preferable.