

Basics for Budgies

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Hopefully you have purchased a young Budgie that has been handfed or handled on a daily basis. This will enable you to quickly have a hand-tamed pet. Continue to handle the Budgie on a regular basis if you intend for it to remain tame. Allow the Budgie to become accustomed to its new home and surroundings for two or three days before you actually try to handle it. Talk to it whenever you pass its cage and as you feed and change the water. Move slowly around it and while you are feeding and changing paper as sudden, fast movements frighten it. Set a routine for you and your new pet and keep to it — feeding times, play time outside the cage, bedtime, etc. Have patience and always treat your Budgie with love and tenderness.

Watch your new bird closely the first two or three days to ensure that it begins to eat. This will be the first sign that it is accepting its new surroundings. As a temptation, we recommend using spray millet available at most reputable feed and seed specialty companies. They can supply you with fresh seed mix that they mix themselves, not the prepackaged brands. It is usually a combination of many millet seeds with thistle added and gives the young bird a good start with eating seed. It is best to add to this seed mix: sprouts, veggies (thawed frozen and fresh), fruits, millet spray and various other goodies. We have had good results with Super Preen vitamins added to the “soft food” such as sprouts, etc. Super Preen is not the only good vitamin supplement, but we have had good results with it and it seems to be the best value for the money (see section on “Food”). Seed alone is not enough to keep your Budgie happy and healthy and to ensure that it lives a long, happy life. We like to leave the radio or TV on when we

are gone for any length of time — it gives the Budgie some company while you are not at home.

Cage Size

At least 27" x 14" x 19" for a single Budgie; this allows plenty of room to exercise and play. The bars should be 1/2" apart; any wider and the Budgie could get stuck in them or escape. *Cages are never too big — only too small — the bigger the cage the better!* If your huge cage has wide bar spacing, use 1/2" x 1/2" wire mesh to line the inside of the cage to prevent the bird from escaping or breaking its neck. The ideal cages for Budgies have bars that are horizontal, as they love to climb around on the sides of the cage.

Perches

Wood is best. Use different diameters and shapes if possible, to help prevent foot problems. Toenails should not touch front to back when sitting on a perch. Natural tree branches from *unsprayed* safe trees make ideal perches to perch on and to nibble. Place one perch close to the feeders and one up high in the cage for security and sleeping; the perch for security and sleeping should be to the back of the cage, but be sure to leave enough head room and tail room. You may have room for more than two perches but do not overcrowd or place perches where they are over food and water dishes. This will help prevent contamination from the bird's feces. We also like to use Comfort Perches as these can be used two ways, either horizontal or vertical.

Cage Location

Select a permanent place away from direct sun, drafts, heater and air conditioning vents. A bright corner in a room where there is activity works best as Budgies are social birds. But we recommend against using a kitchen, as cooking fumes may be harmful to the bird. Budgies like protection from behind and above, so corners or up against a wall is ideal for protecting his back and up on a table or stand where little activity goes on above his head is best. It has been our experience that keeping the bird about your eye level works best. The danger to a bird will always come from above; that is “built into” them. If you place the cage above your eye level, the bird

will feel that it is “boss,” likewise if you put it at knee level you will be a threat to it. *Do not* place the cage on a TV or the stereo speakers; the vibrations are nerve wracking to Budgies and cause them undue stress which could cause illness. We also prefer to cover the top part of the cage at night; we leave the lower half of the cage uncovered to let in some light, and always provide a night light in the event the bird becomes startled in the dark. Budgies have poor eyesight in the dark and, if startled, can injure themselves flapping around in a dark cage. Budgies need 8 to 12 hours of darkness for ample sleep.

Cage Tray

Line the tray with white paper or old newspapers. If you use newspapers, use only the pages that are black and white, as the colored inks can be toxic. Pine shavings are fine but tend to be a bit messy as they scatter all over. Cedar shavings have too strong an aroma.

Toys

For exercise and amusement, choose toys suited for Budgies; the better pet stores that specialize in birds will have employees to assist you in your selection. Some suggested toys; ladder, swing, mirror, lattice balls, wooden toys (to play with and chew on), hoops (big enough for the Budgie to fit in without getting stuck), cow-bell type bells (*do not* use the “jingle bell” type as toes and beaks can become caught in them), rope toys (3/8" diameter rope or larger). If you make your own rope toys, use only untreated rope; hemp or 100% cotton are good. Do not use twine, yarn or string as the Budgie can become caught and tangled in this. *Whatever your choice of rope toys, always check them often to make sure that the bird has not gnawed itself a noose and hung itself.*

Exercise

Allow play time outside the cage daily if possible; this includes some flying time if your Budgie isn't clipped. Time outside the cage is important, especially if your Budgie's cage is not large enough to allow a lot of exercise and wing flapping. *Supervise* the time your Budgie spends outside of the cage at *all times*. *Never* leave him unattended when he is out of the cage for play; accidents happen

quickly and our homes are full of dangers to an unsupervised, curious Budgie.

Bathing

Purchase a bird bath that will fit in the cage door opening, use a spray mister set for a light mist (one that has not been used for anything but water) or use a shallow dish. Lukewarm water is best. Hint: a piece of green, leafy vegetable in the bath or dish helps encourage the Budgie to bathe. We use spinach, kale, endive, collards, turnip greens, and carrot tops. *Always wash the greens thoroughly before giving them to the bird to make sure there is no chemical residue on them*, as during and after their bath they tend to feed on the greens. The best time for the bath is early morning or afternoon; this allows ample time to dry out before bedtime.

Food

Seed is not the only food your Budgie will eat, and seed alone is not a well-rounded diet to keep your Budgie healthy and happy. If the food is good for you to eat, then it is good for the Budgie to eat. (Exceptions: *no chocolate, no pop, no avocado, and no salty foods, please*). We supplement our seed mix with a prepared, extruded, nutritionally balanced formula called Scenic. There are other prepared formulas available, but we prefer Scenic. Our Budgies like the one called "Tropical Bits" best. Use good, fresh seed mix, not the prepackaged kind you find in mall pet stores (go to a feed and seed store and buy *fresh* seed), veggies (thawed frozen and fresh), sprouted seed, fruit, crumbled hard boiled egg, scrambled eggs, cooked meats (chopped up hamburger, fish, chicken, lean roast), moist or dry dog or cat food, cereal, cooked brown rice, cooked sweet potato, cooked macaroni, low-fat cottage cheese, carrots, celery (the leafy part), spinach leaves, carrot tops, corn on the cob, broccoli, cauliflower, broccoflower, cooked beans, wheat bread, millet spray, apples, oranges, peaches, nectarines, apricots, watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, banana, etc. We always sprinkle a small amount of Super Preen vitamins on the soft food, about 1/8 teaspoon. Be sure to wash all fresh veggies and fruits thoroughly before feeding them to your Budgie. Do not feed the

thawed veggies cold; warm them with warm tap water. Do not feed any cooked food that is hot; let it cool a bit. Do not feed the seeds or pits from fruits as they are toxic. Have patience when offering a new food to your Budgie; it will take a few days before he'll get brave enough to try it. Take fresh fruits and veggies out of the cage after a few hours to avoid having the Budgie eat something that has spoiled.

Sprouted Seed

You can sprout fresh seed in clean potting soil in a small saucer and let the Budgie munch away on it, you can sprout seed in a sprouting jar or you can buy alfalfa sprouts or spicy radish mix at the grocery. Take this out after about three hours so it doesn't sour. We mix the alfalfa sprouts in with the sprouts we have sprouted. We use the sprouting jar method. Sprouted seed is a very nutritious food. If you use seed that has been coated with wheat germ oil and vitamin mix, or if the seed is not fresh, it will not sprout.

Water

Fresh, clean water is very important. Change the water daily and, if it needs it, change it more often. We use bottled water from Dillons.

Vitamins and Minerals

There are several ways to supply daily vitamins and minerals; powder that is sprinkled on veggies, fruits or sprouts; seed mixes that are coated or "deluxe"; or in liquid form that is added to the water. Mineral blocks, cuttlebones and oyster shell grit are other sources. The grit aids digestion; a very small amount in a treat cup is sufficient. (Do not sprinkle the grit on the cage tray, this only contributes to sores on the feet). We recommend using Super Preen powdered vitamins and sprinkle it on the soft foods. Vitamins that are added to the water lose their strength and are an excellent medium for bacterial growth in the water.

Cage Cleaning

This is also very important for good health. The cage should be cleaned every day. Change the paper in the tray, freshen and stir the seed and change the water. Wipe the bars off every couple of days with a damp cloth. Perches need to be scraped at

least weekly and the cage should be wiped off every week. Perch scrapers are available in pet stores. The cage should be scrubbed inside and out with a disinfectant monthly — we use Lysol in the brown bottle. Be sure to rinse the cage and dry it thoroughly before placing your Budgie back inside it so he won't become ill. A "spare" cage is helpful at times like this.

Health

To help your Budgie stay in a good, healthy and happy condition, (a) always provide a varied diet, (b) do not feed seed, fruit or veggies that have spoiled or smell musty, (c) always provide fresh, clean water, (d) always keep the cage and perches clean, (e) provide adequate flying time and exercise time, (f) set aside a special time of day for just you and your Budgie to interact, (g) provide safe toys for entertainment while you are at work or away from the Budgie, (h) provide a safe environment inside the cage as well as outside of the cage, (i) keep room temperatures constant, sudden temperature changes can prove harmful; keep the Budgie out of drafts and direct sunlight, (j) never leave the Budgie unsupervised when it is out of the cage, (k) never leave the Budgie locked in the car while you visit or shop and (l) observe your Budgie closely; learn its actions and habits so you will be aware if something does not seem right, (m) remove unsafe house plants from the areas your Budgie has access to and (n) use non-stick cookware with caution as the fumes from overheated non-stick coatings are very toxic to the Budgie's delicate respiratory system.

Take your Budgie to a veterinarian that will treat birds, and have it groomed when you notice that it gets its toenails caught in cloth or clothing, or when they feel sharp on your skin. Wings should be clipped, too. These are both necessary for the safety of the bird. This should be done approximately every four to six months. The charge is minimal and if the bird gets a toe caught it can break its leg trying to get loose or will try to chew its toe off to free itself. Becoming caught in something causes great stress on your bird. Also keeping the wings trimmed will help keep the Budgie tame and easy to handle. *Do not* attempt to trim nails or wings by yourself without

being properly instructed; you may clip into the vein in the toenail or cut a blood feather. The loss of even a small amount of blood is very harmful to your new bird. If you join a bird club, you are sure to meet a bird owner who will be more than happy to help you learn this procedure yourself.

Locate a vet for your Budgie; not all vets treat birds so be sure to find one who will treat your Budgie before the need arises. Some signs to look for if you think your Budgie may be ill; not as active as usual, sleeping more than it usually does, sleeping fluffed up with its head tucked into the feathers on its back (note: a healthy bird will sleep in this same position, *however*, a sick bird sits on both feet and a healthy bird usually sleeps with one foot tucked up into the breast), loss of appetite, a change in the droppings, drooping of the tail, lying on the perch or on the floor of the cage or discharge from the nostrils. This is by no means a complete list; it is meant only as a guide. If you think your Budgie may be ill, *do not hesitate, seek advice quickly*. Call your vet or another bird owner.

How to Hold a Budgie Properly

For the most part, your Budgie will be perching, but should the need arise and you should have to hold it, there is a proper way to do so.

You may want to use a small towel but this isn't necessary. Hold the Budgie firmly, yet loose enough to allow it to breathe. It doesn't take much pressure to prevent the bird from breathing. The Budgie's back will be in the palm of your hand and the head between your thumb and forefinger. Do not apply pressure to the chest, abdomen or neck. Birds breathe from their abdomens — they do not have a diaphragm to aid breathing as humans do. You should only need to restrain the Budgie in this manner to examine it or to clip nails and wings, at other times it will "perch" on your finger just as it would on a perch.

Your Budgie's ID Band

You have, no doubt, noticed a colored band on your Budgie's leg. This is his identification band. The band has a series of letters and numbers and perhaps a logo insignia. These tell what Society (AFA, ABS, SPBE, etc.) the Budgie is registered with, the breeder's code identification,

the year the Budgie hatched and the number of the Budgie. Our Budgies will have either an AFA (American Federation of Aviculture) band or an ABS (American Budgerigar Society) band, depending on whether it is an American Budgie or an English Budgie. The bird can always be traced back to us and we will have a permanent record of its parents and to whom it was sold, when it was sold, how many siblings, etc.

Do not remove or attempt to remove this band. Should the band need to be

removed, consult with a vet to be sure he has the proper tool to remove it or contact us. The band should be removed only if the Budgie has grown so much that it would hinder circulation in the leg and/or foot.

Be sure to write down the band number for safe keeping so that in the event your bird is stolen or gets loose, you can identify it by the band number when it is found. (We provide "hatch certificates" with all of our birds that have this information on them).●



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