



Over the years I have discovered that there are many ways to reduce the cost of feeding my birds. I want them to have the best diet possible, but I am not wealthy. Therefore, I am constantly on the lookout for ways to feed them well without spending a fortune. One of the ways that I save on my bird food bill is by utilizing free or inexpensive pumpkins.

Pumpkin and pumpkin seeds are excellent bird food. They contain high amounts of vitamin A, as well as calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus and other nutrients. Pumpkin foods can make a significant nutritional contribution to the diet of parrots and other birds. Pumpkin bread and soft food mixes containing pumpkin, as well as shelled or unshelled raw pumpkin seeds are a big hit with my birds, but I prefer to feed them fresher food than the canned solid-pack pumpkin available in supermarkets. Also, raw pumpkin seeds have recently become prohibitively expensive, as health food store shoppers well know.

Last year, I discovered that organizations, and even some stores, will give away imperfect pumpkins slated for sale as Halloween or Thanksgiving decorations. I was given more than 80 unsold, perfect pumpkins on the last day they were being sold (Halloween afternoon) last year. Some stores will give you the leftover pumpkins rather than putting them in the landfill. However, you must ask for them. Vendors do not volunteer them initially.

I took over 80 pumpkins home and prepared and stored them last year. By doing a few at a time, I was able to use most of them. I gave away the ones I could not use.

This year, because I had made myself known to them last year, I found that vendors contacted me to dispose of their leftover pumpkins. One vendor offered me 300 surplus pumpkins. This was someone I did not know. He learned of me from other people and tracked me down.

To process them, I cut pumpkins in half and remove the seeds. I wash the seeds well and then spread them on cookie sheets to dry. Putting them in the oven on the warm setting speeds this process. Once they are dry, I place them in gallon-size freezer bags and store them in the freezer until I am ready to feed them to my birds.

I cut the pumpkin halves into wedges and remove the skin. I wash the slices and put them into gallon-size freezer bags and freeze them for later use in bird bread. Blanching the pumpkin slices before freezing would be better, but I did not take the time with the huge number of pumpkins I had to process. When I was ready to use them, I cut the slices into small pieces and added them to the bread mixture. The birds loved it. This year, I cooked some of the wedges in my big crock pot to reduce the volume. Pumpkin adds moisture, flavor, and fiber to bird bread.

My birds thrive on sweet potatoes

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which I can buy from a local farmer at a real savings. His "seconds" sell for only \$10 a bushel (50 pounds). If I purchased "firsts" in the grocery store, 50 pounds would cost \$30 (sixty cents a pound). Last year I shared some of my inexpensive sweet potatoes with my neighbor and she wondered why they were classified as seconds. Sweet potatoes can be stored for many months if kept cool and dry, or they can be cooked and frozen for later use.

Almonds, walnuts, and other nuts that parrots enjoy can be bought in bulk quantities from wholesale suppliers in California at prices significantly lower than retail price. This year I am buying both almonds and walnuts from SAM'S discount store at almost the same price per pound as from the suppliers in California last year. This works out better for me because I can buy smaller quantities and avoid the problem of finding storage space for 25 pound purchases.

I feed a lot of jalapeno peppers to my birds. I have always bought them at the best price I could find, but last year, a friend gave me a large amount of her surplus peppers. She told me how easy it was to raise them and that I could easily raise them in my garden or even in pots. This year I went to the nursery and bought 12 jalapeno plants, six banana pepper plants, and six bell pepper plants. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed with peppers.

I gave some away but I also used a lot of them for my family and my birds. I strung and dried peppers. I dehydrated peppers in my handy-dandy Ronco food dehydrator. I chopped peppers in my Vita Mix food processor and even made salsa, some of which I froze for future use in bird bread. I fed peppers to my birds every day until they started throwing them back at me.

I learned that six banana pepper plants will out-produce 12 jalapeno plants. If you don't have a garden space, you could plant a pepper plant in a big clay pot and have enough jalapeno peppers to keep one or two birds happy and healthy.

Before the first frost of this Fall, I picked at least half a bushel of peppers. I am going to chop and freeze them for future bird bread.

Frozen mixed vegetables can be purchased inexpensively when bought in five-pound bags at SAM'S for only \$3.49 (current price in the Austin, Texas area.). Frozen vegetables are the next best thing to fresh and can be used to stretch our bird food dollars when used with other fresh produce.


I have not fed Nutriberries to my birds this year, but when I did, I ordered them in bulk from Lafeber and the price was substantially better than when buying them in the 2.25 pound buckets. Those individuals who have only a few birds can pool their resources with several other bird owners and buy the 20-pound bulk shipment and share it. This would amount to a substantial savings.

Last year, I discovered that some stores bag the unsold bulk nuts in mesh bags and sell them at a discount. I bought several bags that contained mostly almonds. They stayed nice and fresh in the freezer. My birds enjoyed removing them from the shell to get at their favorite nut.

I buy 50 pound bags of popcorn at SAM'S for around \$10, boil it until the inside of the kernels are soft and puffed up to about three times their size when dry. I add the popcorn to my bird bread or feed or to a soft food mix with cooked beans and rice. The 50 pound bag is much cheaper than buying small bags at the grocery store.

Participating in food co-ops such as SHARE (Self Help And Resource Exchange) can cut the price of many bird foods in half. The savings come from pooling money with other co-op members. Buyers for the co-op seek out the best bargains, and cut out the middle man. Anyone can participate. Call 1-800-548-2124 for a SHARE program in your area.

Be watchful. Recently, I was driving my normal route home and noticed a tree loaded with fruit. I wasn't sure what they were so I read the name on the mailbox and called when I got home. The woman told me they were persimmons and said for me to come and take all of them if I wanted them. Free bird food right off the tree!

We can all find numerous ways of feeding our birds good, nutritious food without going into debt. 

Aracaris Earning Their Keep!

by Jerry Jennings, Fallbrook, CA

Bird breeding is an activity that can be both fun and financially rewarding at the same time. The more birds one raises, the more likely will it be financially rewarding, but the more exotic and challenging species provide more pleasure and sense of accomplishment.

As a budding aviculturist, I could readily see the potential of the production of a thousand Zebra Finches a month, and especially so since my first pair seemed capable of producing sons and daughters on a biblical scale! It didn't immediately occur to me that it might be a greater effort to reach large numbers and the repetitive malaise that accompanies such methods remained hidden from my consciousness. It seemed that one could not easily reproduce a bird that was both challenging, fun, and financially rewarding.

Toucans certainly do not come to mind as a "bread and butter" bird, or a species that gets one back to the "basics." With those thoughts in mind, Emerald Forest Bird Gardens was to be a haven for toucans dependent for their support on the production of parrots. **WRONG!**

Several things have transpired in the intervening years. Parrots have substantially and dramatically declined in value, while softbills, and toucans in particular, have increased. The laws of