

# Gardening

## Is It For The Birds?

by Dorine McKinnon  
St. Petersburg, FL



*Aloe, a very valuable plant for many medicinal reasons, has taken over the strawberry pot.*

**G**ardening, in one form or another, has always been an activity that I find enjoyable. Some of my houseplants have been with me for many years. Recently I have begun incorporating vegetables into different areas of our combined yard and garden with the idea of having some fresh-grown produce and treats for my flock of parrots. They always have enjoyed the fruits of our labors, or more specifically, the fruits from our grapefruit and orange trees. Tangerines also are a favorite. Papaya did not turn out to be an appreciated treat as I had

expected, and neither did loquat fruit.

My birds hold hot red peppers in high esteem. This colorful vegetable is their favorite home-grown treat. They will eat them as tiny forming peppers and they cherish the fully-developed red peppers too. Knowing this, I have planted a whole row of these beauties including three jalapeno pepper plants for variety. Although it is their second choice, I can add it to their vegetable mix for a flavorful surprise. Various peppers have been such a hit that I am adding another row of several hot varieties packaged by Burpee.

No garden would be complete without at least one tomato plant, so I chose a cherry tomato plant for my birds' garden. It was *not* a hit. My guys love regular vine-ripe tomatoes but they look at these like they are a demon grape. I quickly planted three regular tomato plants for their dining pleasure and I guess that hubby and I will be stuck with the rejected cherry tomatoes for our salads—oh what a hardship.

I have a good idea of the staples that my birds enjoy in their daily vegetable mix so I will be test growing several of these including broccoli rapini, a cross between a leafy green and broccoli that I purchase whenever I can find it, much to the delight of my charges. I have even purchased a dandelion plant that I am collecting seed from now. Many of my flock adore dandelion greens, which are available locally only on occasion. The irony of having to purchase this weed did not escape my neighbors and non-bird friends, nor even my husband. I'm sure it will be some time before I will be allowed to forget the fact that I have dug up the grass and bought weeds for the garden.

Parsley and Purple Ruffle Basil are interesting food toys that sometimes are eaten with gusto but other times left untouched. Green beans are an excellent food toy that will keep them busy with both the pod and the beans inside. Since they are so inexpensive and abundant at the market, I chose instead to plant yellow wax beans for my birds to enjoy. They are available only sporadically and almost always are more expensive than plain green beans.

No bird garden would be complete without the addition of sunflower and millet, so I have added both the regular

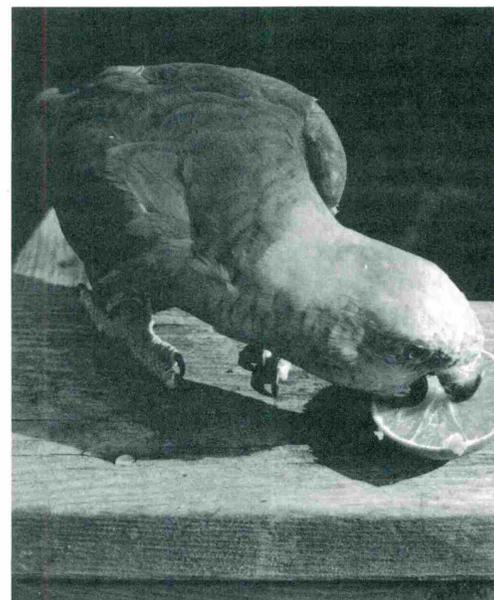
millet and its larger cousin, mega-millet. I scavenged the loose millet that had fallen away from sprays that I fed the birds. I usually cut millet into many small sections and give as a treat or toy. The millet in the bottom of the container usually is cast into the trash so I decided to plant it instead and see just how fresh it had been. Both varieties have been broadcast in the same area and it will be interesting to see what the growing habits are. The sunflower is a variety of different types as well. I did not see any of the large gray stripe that most birds relish, so I will be making a trip to the health food store to seek some of these for planting.

I have consistently collected and planted the tops of pineapples, hoping that someday we may actually be blessed with another pineapple. So far it has been a nice dream, but with gardening and bird breeding, hope springs eternal.

We have had many failures in the garden. We learned early that loquat fruits from our trees were left untouched by almost every Amazon. Last year we lost the basil plants before the first beakful could be tasted. This year our strawberries linger after producing only a couple of tiny fruits.

It has been a great deal of fun to combine two of my passions in life, birdkeeping and gardening, and my feathered friends could not be happier about it. 

Photos by Dorine McKinnon



*A Yellow-naped Amazon enjoys a sweet tree ripened Temple Orange.*