

# BUILD YOUR OWN BIRD EQUIPMENT

or

## Budget-wise Training Stands, Shower Perch, and Portable Playgrounds

by Linda Roberts  
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Remember being told that the difficult challenges of life are often blessings in disguise? One such blessing for me has been, through necessity, the ability to improvise, do things myself or make them myself – this includes clothes, home improvements and, most recently, pet bird equipment.

Whenever I see something that is a want or a need, my first thought is, “Can I make it myself?” For many years, my love of birds was restricted to a family pet bird of either a Budgie or Cockatiel. When it was finally possible to get a “big” parrot, a whole new world opened up to me and, at the same time, that new world kept opening up my wallet!

There had to be a way to cut some of those costs so I developed a few items that are simple, functional, durable, and affordable to make. Each of them is something we need for our pet birds – an \$8 table-top training t-stand, an \$8 floor training t-stand, a \$9 no-slip shower perch, and a \$9.50 portable play-basket. Once you have your materials, most of them take less than 30 minutes to assemble (the play-basket takes about an hour.)

**Important Note:** The above t-stands are training stands, not play stands. A training stand is used only for short periods of time when an actual training session is in progress (which means the bird is on it for usually no more than 5-15 minutes once or twice a day). A play stand must have what I call “play value” – with several perches or levels for climbing, toys to play with and chew, and something to shred, as well as a food and water cup. My portable play-basket fits those qualifications and is a great tool for providing a designated area for pet birds, as well as a safe place for them to chew, eat, and drink. Your bird can be nearby on his play-basket, while you have your hands free for things like checking the kids’ homework, clipping out coupons, or washing dishes. (More on the play-basket below.)

Before we discuss actual instructions, you must understand that I’m not a carpenter; however, I am a firm believer in the full service of the small independently owned neighborhood hardware stores. I can’t emphasize strongly enough how important it is to establish a good customer relationship with your local privately owned hardware store. You will get the right items the first time,

and you will get that extra advice to make your project go smoothly. Whether it’s replacing rotting trim on my porch posts, replacing a blown electrical outlet, a leaking faucet, or making t-stands and props for my pet birds, when I go to my local Ace Hardware store, there is someone who personally stays with me as I select each and every item needed for my project. The service continues as they cut the wood to my specifications (often helping me calculate those specifications), give me tips to make the job easier and, yes, even refer me somewhere else if they don’t have the tool or item I need!

All the wood, PVC, and hardware prices given below are based on purchases made on February 25, 2001, at an Ace Hardware store in my area. The clerk not only cut the wood to my specifications (including the dowels), but the screws were sold singly, so I do not have a partial package of items that I will never use for anything else. Okay, enough of that – here we go:

### Tabletop Training T-stand:

These dimensions are for a medium size bird (Eclectus, Greys, cockatoos); but the diameter of the dowel can be increased or decreased for larger or smaller birds.

### Dimensions:

12" x 12" base, 14" high and 14" wide perch

### Materials List:

	Price
Base: 1" x 12" pine (cut into a 12" x 12" square).	\$1.39
Vertical post: 1 1/8" diameter dowel (14" long)	\$3.80
Horizontal perch: 1 1/8" diameter dowel (14" long)	\$3.80
Base screw: 3/16" x 1 1/2" flat head wood screw	\$0.07
Perch screw: 4/16" x 1 1/4" screw	\$0.25

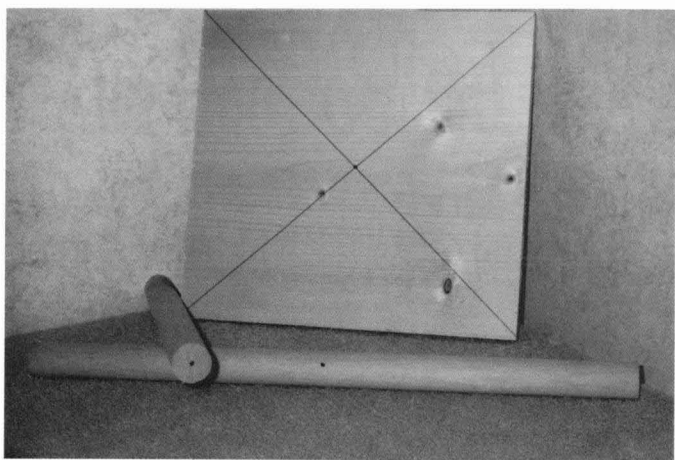
### Tools Needed:

Drill, pliers, and screwdriver  
Two drill bits, assorted sizes  
Wood glue  
(Optional: counter sink tool – attaches to your drill)

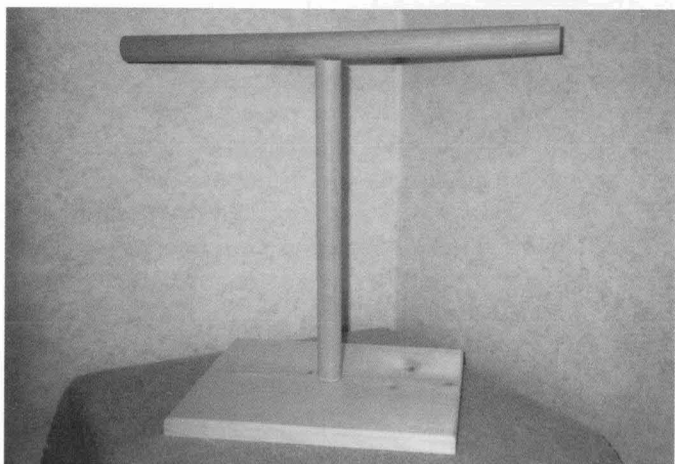
### Assembly:

Drill four holes:

**Horizontal perch:** Drill a hole in the center of the 14" perch (drill only 3/4" deep).



*Tabletop T-stand—marking for drill holes, "X" to find the center of wood base. Note center holes drilled into dowels. Finished tabletop T-stand below.*



**Vertical post:** drill two holes: Using the 3/16" bit, drill one hole in the very end of the dowel (we will call this end A). Using the 7/64" bit, drill one hole in the other end of the dowel (we will call this end B).

**Base:** To find the center of the base, draw lines from one corner to another, forming an X on the bottom. The center of the base is where the lines intersect. Using a 7/64" bit, drill a hole all the way through the board. If you have a counter sink tool, put this on your drill and use it to widen the hole into a funnel-shape so that the head of the screw will lie flat against the wood. If you don't have a counter sink tool, after you drill the 7/64" hole, you can use a very large drill bit and drill into the same hole on the bottom side of the board about 1/8" deep so that the head of the screw will be set inside the larger opening and allow the base to remain totally flat (but do not drill all the way through with the larger bit!)

Using pliers to hold the middle of the screw, turn the screw into the hole drilled in end A of the vertical post (this does take a little muscle to get started — you can roll the screw threads in a bar of soap to help it go in easier.) Stop when the dowel screw is half-way into the vertical post.

Now insert the flat head wood screw up through the bottom of the wood base, twist the vertical post (end

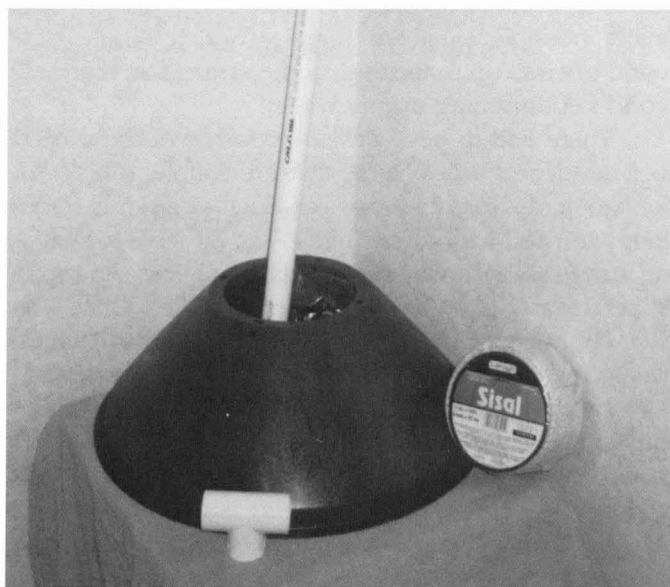
B) onto the wood screw (use a screwdriver to hold the screw in place.) Do not tighten all the way just yet.

Next, just spin the horizontal dowel perch onto the other end of the dowel screw on end A of the vertical post. Once this is on tightly, you can now apply the optional drops of wood glue to the base where the vertical post attaches, then tighten the screw so the post is sturdy. Make sure to let the glue dry thoroughly before using and be careful to clean up any glue from the surface so your bird can't get to it.

That's it! Three pieces of wood, two screws and, voila, a table-top t-stand!

### Floor Training Stand:

Here again, the dimensions given are for a medium size bird; but it would be simple to change the dowel diameter for larger or smaller birds. I did loan this to someone with a Blue and Gold Macaw at a bird club meeting, and it worked well for the macaw. The Christmas tree base provides a great no-tip base that is washable and affordable, especially if you buy them right after the holidays when everything is marked down!



Photos by Linda Roberts

*Materials for a floor T-stand: PVC pipe PVC T-joint, and sisal twine. Not shown, the 24" dowel for perch.*

**Dimensions:** 45" high and 24" wide (perch width)

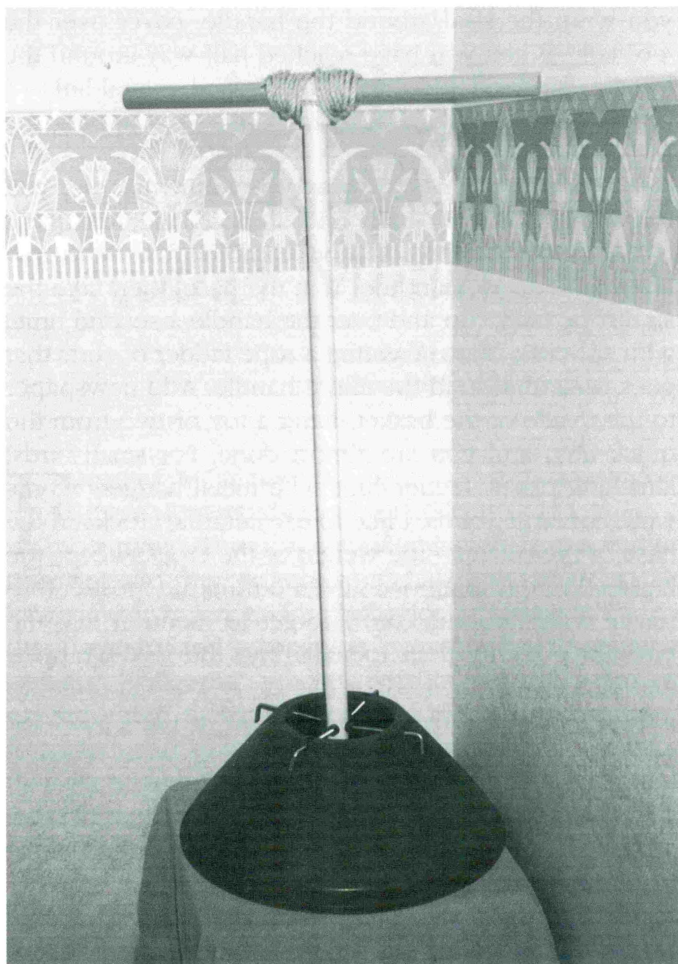
### Materials list:

	Price
Base: Plastic Christmas tree base (on sale)	\$3
Vertical post: PVC (\$1.25/foot)	\$4.95
T-joint for perch: PVC	\$0.75
Horizontal perch: 1 1/2" dowel (cut to 24")	\$2.50

(note: Total dowel cost \$5.25 -- at 48" long, one dowel will make two perches)

Non-slip wrap: Sisal or jute twine, 1 roll	\$2.50
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(Make sure the twine is un-oiled for use with your pet birds; I have found un-oiled sisal easier to find than un-oiled jute.)



*Finished Floor T-stand.*

#### Assembly:

No tools required!

Insert vertical PVC post into tree stand, tighten bolts until the post is tight.

Slip the PVC t-joint onto the top of the post (it's a nice snug fit, so no glue is needed).

Run the dowel through the PVC t-joint until it is centered.

Wrap sisal tightly around the PVC t-joint and wrap the sisal a couple of times around the dowel perch as well. Knot securely and trim off sisal. The sisal serves two purposes – it keeps the dowel firmly in place and also covers the slippery surface of the PVC t-joint.

That's it! (Note: If your dowel does not fit snugly through the PVC t-joint, you

can drill a hole through the PVC and run a screw through the PVC t-joint and into the dowel to prevent the dowel from shifting (but you'd have to ask your hardware store which kind of screw to use for this purpose.)

#### Non-slip Shower Perch

This shower perch works well for my Cockatiel and conure as well as my cockatoo and Eclectus. It stays in my shower stall all the time – a simple twist loosens it to be moved out of the way, and another twist tightens it back in a matter of seconds when it's birdy shower time! I usually put two or three birds at a time on this perch, but that is definitely dictated by the compatibility of the birds.

#### Materials List:

	Price
One 6-foot twist-adjustment shower rod	\$6.99
One roll Vet-wrap tape (dark green color)	\$1.50

#### Assembly:

No tools needed here!

Twist-adjust the shower rod to fit your shower width. Wrap tightly with the vet-wrap tape, overlapping edges closely so it makes a very thick and cushy perch for the birds.

#### Portable Play-basket

I have to admit, this is my favorite item and was actually my first – even a 12-year old could make this one! My birds are all conditioned to stay on their play baskets for extended periods of time – but it's never real-



*Compatible bathers, L to R: Quaker Parakeet, Sun Conure, and Cockatiel share the much used and appreciated shower perch covered with Vet-wrap.*

ly a difficult thing to teach. With toys to play with, wicker to shred, paper to shred, food and water included – and human mommy or daddy nearby, what bird wouldn't be happy to stay put? When my birds go to bird club meetings, to the library for story time, or to a friend's house, their basket always goes as well (no cage, just the carrier for the car ride and the basket once we are inside). It seems that the basket is perceived as their "territory," so they leap to their play-basket and stay put during the whole visit, no matter where we are. Note: Keep in mind that wicker baskets are considered "appropriate" chewing and they will be chewed – so don't buy expensive baskets or use that beautiful basket that your daughter handmade in art class!

### Materials list:

	Price
Wicker basket with a handle (approximate size at base: 11" x 14")	\$7.00
Important note: wicker basket should be unpainted, unstained, and unvarnished wicker only! Your bird will chew this basket; untreated wicker is the only acceptable material.	
Un-oiled Sisal twine (1/8 roll)	\$2.25
Plastic chain link or stainless steel quick-link	\$1.50

Punch a hole in the middle of the wrapper around the sisal twine. Pull up the end that is in the center of the twine (do not remove wrapper). Leaving a 4-6" tail, begin wrapping the basket handle at one end, repeatedly bringing the sisal package around the perch handle, making sure to wrap very tightly so that none of the wicker handle is visible between the sisal twine. As

Photo by Linda Roberts



*The destruction crew stands ready to start work on these recently completed floor and table-top T-stands and play baskets.*

you wrap the sisal around the handle, cover over the 4-6" tail. When you have reached half-way around the handle, stop and add on a quick-link or several links of plastic chain on the sisal, then continue wrapping the rest of the handle.

Once you have wrapped the entire handle, you can knot it several times and snip off the remaining twine. If you want to add more climbing fun to the covered handle, you can knot it at the base, then take the sisal rope back up and over the handle a second time, with sporadic knots, creating a rope ladder of sorts that goes up and around the entire handle. Add newspaper to the inside of the basket, hang a toy or two from the quick link, and you are almost done. For small birds, attaching plastic feeder cups with metal hangers works well. For larger birds, I like to use ceramic crocks in the base of the basket – the weight of the crocks keeps the baskets from tipping over, even during the most enthusiastic wing-flapping (did I forget to mention that the birds love to dig their toenails into the sisal-wrapped handle and flap their wings like crazy?) Don't forget to add fun foraging toys in the bottom of the basket for your birds – plastic caps from spring water bottles, plastic beads, foot toys, an almond in the shell, etc. Sometimes I fill the bottom with 1"-wide strips of newspaper and they thoroughly enjoy shredding that into confetti-size pieces.

Clean up is easy for these baskets -- change the paper and wipe up droppings with a diluted bleach solution. If a more thorough cleaning is needed, just put the basket in the bathtub, scrub it down with a soft scrub brush, using diluted bleach or other bird-safe cleaner, rinse well, and put out in the sunshine to dry. The sisal-wrapped handle takes scrubbing well and dries surprisingly fast! Just remember that a basket can never be too big if it is to be used as a play area for your pet bird – the best ones I have found are about the size of a picnic basket (but they are hard to find).

Personal history: Linda shares her home with six beautiful and intelligent parrots (Sun Conure, Citron-crested Cockatoo, Vosmaeri Eclectus, Timneh Grey, Quaker Parakeet, and a Pied Cockatiel.) The conure and cockatoo were "planned" and purchased additions to the household – the other four were surprise additions (rescued second-hand birds with various nutritional, environmental, and emotional issues.) A former member of the Board of the Gateway Parrot Club in St. Louis, Missouri, she still is very involved in that bird club's monthly educational programs, newsletter publication and philanthropic efforts. ➤