

Why and How to Bathe Your Bird

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



birdbaths

Your Bathing Beauty

In

the wild, a bird gets soiled while foraging for food and from around-the-clock exposure to the elements. To keep clean, a bird may clean themselves during a rain shower, find a puddle, lake, or stream, or playfully hop through wet grasses and vegetation.

In your home, however, your pet bird faces much different challenges. A cage, for example, can quickly become more soiled than any nest in the wild. Your pet relies on you to keep it clean. Also, the temperature-controlled environment your pet shares with you is likely to be much dryer than the one they would otherwise experience, especially if you have forced-air heat or an air-conditioner.

Indoors, your bird's skin can become very dry, making [bathing](#) or misting essential. It maintains their plumage by helping to remove dust, extra oils, dander, loose feathers, and insect pests, while supplying supplemental moisture. Bathing also maintains the insulating properties of feathers, moistens the skin, and much more.

Most birds need little, if any, encouragement to bathe. Simply providing the means does the job. But it may take a bit of experimentation and observation to learn your bird's preferences. Just as birds vary in personality, so do they vary in how they prefer to bathe.

What constitutes an effective bird bath?

The best bird bath is a good, freshwater rinse or a misting from a spray bottle. [Commercial sprays](#) are available that have ingredients to soften plumage, soothe dry skin, and deodorize.

Because soap removes the natural oils from feathers, dries the skin, and is difficult to rinse off, it should be avoided altogether. If your bird gets into any substance that won't easily rinse away with water or spray, contact your veterinarian for assistance.

Because water streams can be powerful, and temperature extremes can be dangerous, bathing must be handled with care. Birds should always be supervised when bathing. And you should never force your bird to bathe. Birds know when they aren't in shape for a soaking.

Many birds enjoy bathing every day, while others only bathe occasionally. Start by offering a bath to your bird once or twice weekly. You will quickly learn the bird's preferences. You should also increase bathing during molting to help pin feathers come through, reduce their itch, and soften the keratin for easy removal.

Keep everything in moderation

Birds have a body temperature of about 105°F - 107°F, maintained in large part by their feathers. To avoid chilling your bird, use lukewarm to room temperature water for baths. During the bath, and while the bird is drying, be sure that the



room is warm and that there are no drafts. Try to bathe your bird early in the day so that she will be completely dry before she goes to sleep.



Some larger birds will allow you to help dry them. Try wrapping your parrot or cockatiel, for example, in a towel and gently stroking her body in the direction that the feathers lay. Never use an electric hair dryer. It can seriously and quickly burn your bird, and may even emit toxic fumes.

After a healthy bath, you may notice your bird's chest muscles shivering. This behavior is not due to the cold, but rather the result of muscles contracting and expanding to generate body heat and help dry the feathers.

Where to bathe?

Owners of small birds usually find it convenient to make arrangements for in-cage bathing. Owners of larger birds have more out-of-cage options. Choosing the right option will reduce hassles and make bathing enjoyable for you and your bird:

In-cage bathing options

Heavy, low-profile, bath bowl - For in-cage bathing, select a short, heavy, and stable bowl or cooking dish, and fill it with water one to two inches deep, depending on the size of your bird. The low height is beneficial for perching and helps reduce tipping. In their exuberance, however, birds may splash water over the rim, wetting the bedding below. To avoid creating a breeding ground for bacteria, fungus, and mold, be sure to replace the bedding any time it becomes wet.

Cage-mounted bath - Well-designed [baths](#) can be temporarily attached to the side of the cage. These are fun for the bird, can be removed for easy cleaning, and help keep moisture away from the cage floor.

Wet branches - Some birds will bathe themselves by rubbing their feathers against moistened greens placed in their cage. In addition to promoting cleanliness, the greens also help round out your bird's diet.

Out-of-cage options

Shower perch - If you have a large bird, you can position a [shower perch](#) where she can be an observer, a splashee, or directly in-stream. Most showering birds can tolerate only a gentle spray. Avoid full-blast, hard sprays. In time, your bird will let you know how much water she prefers.

Kitchen sink, bath, or laundry room tub - Your bird may enjoy the [spray attachment](#) on your sink or tub. Be sure to control the strength of the water coming out of the nozzle, and never point it directly in your bird's face.

Because birds are sensitive to fumes and susceptible to germs, you should clean sinks and tubs with water and mild, unscented dish soap, and then rinse thoroughly, before bathing your bird. And as a measure of protection for you and your family, clean the bath area thoroughly afterward.



Spray Bottle or mister - Some birds enjoy a daily shower from the water bottle. As with a shower head, never spray your bird directly in the face. If your bird fusses about the spray, try the finer spray of a plant mister.

Summary Tips

- Bathe your bird in lukewarm to room temperature water
- Fill bathing bowls only one to two inches deep, depending on the size of your bird.
- Never spray directly into your bird's face
- Never expose your wet bird to the cold or drafts
- Never use soap
- Bathe your bird early in the day to allow adequate drying time
- Never force your bird to bathe
- Never use an electric blow dryer on your bird
- Consult your veterinarian if your bird becomes soiled with a substance that is difficult to remove