

Use Bird Treats to Reward, Not Appease

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Treats and snacks are more than just nourishment and energy for your birds. They can be a source of motivation, mental and physical stimulation, and behavior modification. Keep a few important considerations in mind, and you can use treats to achieve many positives, not only for your bird, but also for better harmony in your home.

Polly want a cracker

Training sessions are an ideal time to use treats. Whether the goal of the session is to teach your bird to step-up, to retrieve, to perform a new trick, or to use a new word or phrase, treats are an effective motivator or reinforcement of newly learned behaviors.

Use [treats](#) that your bird loves, and save them exclusively for training sessions. Break the treat into bite size portions when training, for two reasons. First, small portions can be consumed quickly, bringing your bird's focus quickly back to the training session rather than on eating. Secondly, you can feed bite size nibbles consistently throughout the training session without overfeeding. Consistency is very important in helping your bird establish a clear connection between the treat and the desired action. Always give your bird the treat immediately after the correct behavior to avoid confusing your bird.



Use it or lose it

In the wild, birds employ a number of skills for finding food and solving problems. They use their beaks and talons like tools to work bits of food out of shells, pods, and crevices. All the while, their minds are actively engaged and challenged. It is no surprise then, that having food placed before him in the cage eliminates an important and necessary intellectual exercise.

One of the easiest ways to engage your bird's intellect in the cage environment is by offering puzzling treat toys. Rather than just giving him a treat, make him work for it as part of play. You can buy [treat toys](#), or you can make them yourself using toys with crevices or openings to wedge treats inside. Some treat toys are like a [puzzle](#), and your bird gets the treat only if he can correctly manipulate the toy.

Hold the "appeasing" appetizers

Treats are rewards, and should never be given to appease your bird. Some owners, for instance, use treats to quiet a screeching or noisy bird. This practice actually reinforces the negative behavior because birds soon learn to associate the treat with the screeching behavior. Instead, treat your bird only for positive behaviors. This approach is more likely to promote future good behavior and will strengthen your bond with your bird under positive circumstances.

Treats as stress beaters

Certain natural treats, especially [millet](#), deliver loads of B vitamins, thought to help curb stress in birds. Less stress means fewer stress-related behaviors such as feather picking and excessive preening. Treats have many positive uses by both the bird owner and the bird. Like all good things, moderation is advised. Take into consideration your bird's daily caloric need and specific nutritional needs.

WE RECOMMEND



Bits of [Fresh Millet](#) can be placed in crevices in many of your existing toys to make a rewarding challenge.



[Foraging Wheel](#) [Foraging Toy](#)

Put your bird's problem-solving skills to the test whether you're home or away with this multi-chambered treat dispenser.



[Buffet Ball](#)

can be filled with small treats, shreddables, pellets or anything that tempts your bird