Bird Cages, How to Choose

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One's home says a lot about one's personality. For many of us, our dream home is the largest we can afford, boasting all the amenities we need, and is located in an environment we admire. The home you choose for your bird should follow similar aspirations, for both your bird's safety and health, as well as to pique her personality.

It is no secret that your bird's health and well-being is directly linked to the quality and cleanliness of her cage. Your bird's cage should be large enough for her to stand comfortably and move freely within it and spread her wings. The cage bars should be appropriately sized to prevent escape or injury but still encourage instinctive activities, such as climbing, flying, or play. It should also house appropriate toys, food dishes, water bowls, perches, and treat holders that benefit your bird's health and also stimulate her instincts and intelligence, all without making your bird feel like she is lost in a crowd of accessories.

But when it comes time to choose a cage, many owners are ready to fly the coop. With the myriad of cage styles, sizes, colors, and safety features, choosing the correct cage for a specific bird and budget is often the most difficult decision a bird owner must make. But by understanding the differences each style offers, the safety benefits of each material, and the instincts and tendencies of your bird, choosing a cage is no longer something to ruffle your feathers about.

Styles for Every Bird

Though it may seem like there is a style of cage for each of the over 9,000 known bird species, cages can basically be broken down into four styles. The

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type of cage you choose should be based on a number of factors. It should be appropriately sized. It should be safe, yet comfortable, for your bird. It should encourage your bird's natural instincts (such as to fly or climb). Finally, it should include features or accessories that make cage maintenance easier, thereby allowing you to spend more time with your bird.

The basic styles include:

- Flight cages - Also known as aviaries, these cages are large in either width or height to encourage your bird to move around. For a finch, for example, width is more important since they tend to flit about from side to side.

- Dometop cages - As the name implies, these cages boast an expanded, curved top section as opposed to the traditional box shape. The extra interior space in these cages is great for active birds who like to climb or fly. It is also an easy way to offer multiple birds a little more head room without sacrificing more floor space in your house.

- Playtop cages - For active birds who spend large amounts of time outside of their home, these cages make an excellent choice. Many models even boast a detachable playtop that allows you to carry it into a different room for a change of scenery for your bird. Plus, since the playtop matches the cage and sits on top of it when not in use, you get a cage-coordinated playland that easily stores in the otherwise wasted space above your cage.

- Classic cages - Whether short and squat or tall and long, these boxy cages are full of both function and style. Similar to flight cages, but more proportionate in overall size, there is a classic cage to comfortably suit most any bird, often at a more affordable price.

Of course, there are many variations of these four basic cage styles. In fact, many modern cages are as elegant as the finest furniture and loaded with features to please any bird. But by matching the style of cage to your bird's instincts, personality, and tendencies, you can easily narrow your options down to a more manageable flock.

Sizes for Every Style

Whether you own an African Grey parrot, a cockatiel, or a pair of canaries, each of the above cage styles is available in a size suited to your particular bird. Cage size is the most important component of cage choice. Having a cage that is too small for your bird limits her ability to move about, stretch her wings, and play inside the cage. In short, confining your large

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bird in a tiny cage is cruel. On the contrary, there is no cage too large for your bird, providing it has appropriately spaced cage bars. The spacing between the bars should be narrow enough to prevent injury if your bird tries to escape. Also, your bird's head should not be able to fit between the bars.

Safety in Every Home

Even if your bird spends a large amount of time socializing on a playstand outside of her cage, she still spends a lot of time inside her cage when you are away. As such, your bird will have a lot of time to manipulate door latches, chew on exposed nuts or bolts, and push or pull on the cage bars, whether trying to get out or simply being active in play. The best modern cages, however, boast a variety of important safety features, including:

- Solid construction - Cages need to withstand whatever abuse your bird can inflict, whether from play or destructive behavior. Choose a cage with a welded design to help prevent your bird from injury or escape. Never place your bird into a wooden or plastic cage, as it is only a matter of time before she chews her way to freedom. Also, leave those old antique cages for decorations; most of these were intended for such use anyway. Instead, choose metal, or, for an even stronger, "bird-proof" cage, choose medical or surgical grade stainless steel.

- Strong latches - There are basically three types of cage latches, each suited to prevent escape depending on your bird's specific capabilities. Cages with sliding doors often use gravity to remain closed. Those with swing-out doors usually use a tension closure. Cages with hinged doors more than likely use a dead-bolt style latch. The key is to choose a closure your bird will be unable to manipulate. But the more secure the latch the better. Many bird owners complement the cage latches with the addition of a cage lock.

- Access doors - Often the most overlooked cage aspect, the size and usability of your cage's access doors play a major part in your bird's willingness to enter or leave the cage. The general rule is that you should be able to at least reach your entire arm through the majority of access doors on your bird's cage. This ensures you can reach your bird wherever she is in the cage and also that your bird can freely pass between the doors when desired.

Features for Every Feather

After choosing a cage that is styled to suit your bird's preferences, sized to comfortably house her, and loaded with safety features to keep her secure, there are included features and accessories to contend with. Most features are a

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convenience to you while you clean. Others may benefit your bird. But all should never compromise the cage's integrity or safety. Some added conveniences include:

■ Large access doors - Many cages boast entire front panels or at least large doors that remove or open fully to ease cleaning and cage access. This is an especially nice feature in exceptionally large bird cages that would otherwise require you to disassemble the cage when cleaning those hard-to-reach corners.

■ Convenient feeder doors - Easily accessible feeders have taken the frustration out of offering your bird both clean water and a suitable diet. Many cages feature an individual door on which you can mount your bird's food crocks and water dishes. These small, locking doors easily swing open to daily clean and replenish your bird's food and water without opening up the entire cage and leaving an avenue for bird escape.

■ Slide-out litter trays - Though you might be hard-pressed to find a bird cage without a slide-out litter tray these days, don't overlook this all important and ever convenient cage inclusion. It makes daily cleaning chores nearly hassle free, especially if you need to keep your bird in her cage during cleaning time.

■ Built-in seed guards - Whether integrated into the base of your cage or added later from a universal kit, these shield your floor and furniture from much of your bird's food and waste scatter. Of course, seed guards do not stop your bird from spitting smaller food items across the room; but it will contain much of the food pieces that are dropped during normal eating.

■ Extra accessories - Most purchased cages include starter accessories, such as food crocks, water dishes, and perches. But ensure the accessories your cage includes are best suited for your bird. Smaller birds need smaller diameter perches. Whatever size your bird, however, be sure to purchase perches of different diameters and materials to make it easy on your bird's feet. A larger bird needs chew-proof dishes, such as those made from ceramic or stainless steel. The good news is, by using a cage intended for your size and bird species, most of the accessories are in the acceptable range of both size and construction. However, even the best accessories need to be complemented with suitable, added climbing ladders, perches, toys, and nests to ensure your bird's environment stimulates her instincts, needs, and curiosity.

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- Cage Size Guide
- Accessories Need for Bird Cages
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