

# Variety is the Spice of Your Bird's Life

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

A quality feed should be the foundation of your bird's nutritional program, but it should not be the only food provided. Variety in the diet of your bird is more important than most owners think. Feeding a blend of natural and prepared foods can promote total nutritional balance. Plus, it can be fun for you and your bird. Observing your bird to learn its dietary preferences not only gets you in better touch with your pet, but also enhances your bird's lifestyle.

Different species of birds have very different nutritional needs. Even within the same species, diet may differ depending upon the environment. Variety in food choices is a joy for any bird. And variety can come in many forms not only what you feed, but how you feed it.

Birds decide what to eat by sight, texture, and taste. Be creative when you prepare meals, in addition to offering food in its most natural state.

**Offer vegetables** - raw and fresh, steamed, boiled, sliced, grated, in omelets, with casseroles, or thawed. Freeze-dried vegetables are a convenient alternative. You might start with a [mix](#) to discover your bird's favorites, and then work their favorites into regular rotation.

**Offer fruits** - the variety of tastes and colors make [fruit](#) a favorite, whether fresh or dried.

**For larger birds, feed corn** on the cob rather than kernels of corn in a dish.

**Sprinkle hulled [seeds](#) on the egg of French toast** (the egg also contains a carotene which naturally brightens yellow plumage) and then cook as usual.

**Add fruits or hulled seeds to pancakes before cooking.** (Any fresh fruits and vegetables left uneaten should be discarded daily so spoiling is not a problem).

**Nuts** offer a wide range of tastes and are rich in vitamins and fatty acids.

**Be creative** in feeding also. This will help entertain the bird as well as make meals take time and energy.

- Hang food from the cage top or sides.
- Weave food into the bars of the cage.
- Stuff food in the spaces of pine cones.
- Offer nuts unshelled to larger birds so they have to work to get at the scrumptious meat.
- Use graham crackers, dog biscuits, and healthy cereals as occasional treats.

Add insects to your bird's diet for yet another way to increase the variety. Check out our [canned mealworms](#) and [crickets](#). Avoid catching bugs in the backyard to feed, as you do not know what pesticides or other chemicals they may have been exposed to. If you buy your insects from Drs. Foster & Smith, you can be assured of high quality, pesticide-free bugs.

A balanced diet is a necessity to allow the bird to live a full and healthy life and should include about 10% fruits, 30-50% vegetables, and 5% meat and dairy products such as eggs, cheese, yogurt, chicken, ground beef, or dog kibble. The remainder should be made up of pelleted food, seeds, [nuts](#), and [treats](#).

Malnutrition from an unbalanced diet is the main cause of disease and early death in pet birds and is entirely a human-caused disease. Fortunately, it is also treatable by changing the diet. As pet owners, we must be the ones to actively study avian nutrition and provide what our pet birds need to thrive. Mixing your own seed/fruit/nut mix or cooking is a great way to learn more about your bird, and that means you will have a closer bond and be able to spot trouble before it starts.

