

Perches: Variety is Critical to Your Bird's Health

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

A bird's entire life is spent either standing or flying - most of the time perched in trees on branches, standing all day, sleeping all night, always in the same position.

- **Natural...** If you choose to make natural perches, do not use branches from any tree that has been sprayed. Select branches from unsprayed trees in your own yard. Check a list of toxic trees to be sure you are using safe wood. Avoid, for example, oak, pine, and cherry. To prepare the branches, scrub them in hot, soapy water, rinse and dry thoroughly, and then put them in the oven for half an hour at 200-250°F. Allow to cool before use. Most birds love natural branches, especially because they enjoy stripping their bark. A number of natural materials are also available commercially. For example, some manufacturers now include natural [Manzanita](#) perches in their new cages. Replacements are readily available.

...and Artificial. Many new birdcages come with dowels made of hard wood. Replacement dowels are easy to obtain. But do not assume dowels are your only option. Styles of artificial [perches](#) are available in virtually every shape, color, texture, size, and material imaginable. They arrive sterile and can be used right out of the package.

- **Regular...** Your bird needs a mix of regular shapes - round, oval, rectangular, or flat - and irregular shapes - those with varying tapers, knobs, branches, and so on. Because some birds occasionally prefer to sit with their toes extended on a flat surface, you might provide a wide perch such as a board or wire platform. However, these flat surfaces should never be the bird's only option.

Ace our perch quiz

- Can the perch be natural or artificial?
- Can the shape of the perch be regular or irregular?
- Can the surface of the perch be smooth or coarse?
- Can the perch be flexible or rigid?
- Can the perch be hard or soft?

The answer to all of the above questions is "yes." You need to provide each for a healthy environment. And, just as importantly, to ensure that your bird's feet get the proper exercise, you need to routinely change the mix of styles and their location.

...and Irregular. The list of irregular perches is endless. [Manzanita](#), [Manu Mineral](#), and the [Safety Perch](#), for example, are all good choices. Each will provide healthy exercise for your bird and add character to his cage.

- **Smooth...** Surfaces can be too smooth for comfort. Standard PVC pipe, for example, is very hard to grip. Most commercial perches made of artificial materials are machine-textured to improve grip.

...and Coarse. [Nail and beak conditioning perches](#) made of concrete, clay, and other materials do a good job of trimming nails. However, they are not comfortable for the bottom of the bird's feet for long periods of time. Always provide an alternate perch.

- **Flexible...** In observations of aviary birds where both rigid and non-rigid perches were used, the birds equally divided their time between the two. Both types should be provided for your bird's use. When not flying, your bird may walk, but generally jumps from place to place. It needs places for both firm and soft landings. A soft rubber or plastic hose stretched across the cage, for example, makes an ideal flexible perch. [Rope perches](#) come in a range of thicknesses to afford your bird a different feel, but be sure that you cut off any frayed pieces of rope so that the bird doesn't get his nails caught. Rigid perches mounted with a spring end also provide a cushioned stop, as do [swings](#).

...and Rigid. All birds need at least one rigid perch available at all times. This will afford them a solid grip and a comfortable place to sleep.

- **Hard...** Most plastic and hardwood perches are easy to clean and durable.

...and Soft. Lovebirds, conures, parrots, parakeets, and cockatiels all prefer perches

made of softwoods. You can create your own soft perches with soft plastic hose, or by wrapping [wooden perches](#) with padded-cotton, cork, carpeting, or soft material such as flannel or felt.

Materials to avoid

It is normal if your bird chews and ingests wood from his perches. But if your bird mouths the hardware on perches, replace it immediately with stainless steel. Avoid zinc hardware which can rust and create toxicity problems. Plastic perches provide many fun and interesting options, but be careful that your bird doesn't ingest the plastic.

Placement and cleaning tips

- Perches should be placed in front of food and water dishes so the bird can reach the dishes easily.
- To avoid droppings contaminating the food or water, do not place perches directly above the dishes.
- Always place a perch so that the bird's tail will not touch the side of the cage when perched on it.
- Place perches at various levels within the cage.
- Avoid using too many perches, which could prevent the bird from flying. A bigger cage might be the better choice, not fewer perches.
- Scrub perches regularly.

Perches provide more than "standing room only"

In addition to providing standing room, perches serve other important roles - physical, practical, and social. Your bird will also use a perch as a tool, a place to rub his beak to remove pieces of food, and a place of play. Perches are places of socialization for pairs or groups. And height is used to signify status. [Out-of-cage perches](#) and stands enable you to integrate your pet into your surroundings, while providing him a place of

security.

Providing your bird a variety of perches is fun, easy-to-do, and will help ensure his comfort and fitness. It's a change-in-the-cage your bird will appreciate.