

# Feeding parakeets in captivity

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Parakeets are generalist feeders that primarily feed on fruits and seeds and will opportunistically consume flowers, buds, stalks, etc. Unlike many other birds, they do not consume animal-based proteins in nature and fulfil their protein requirements primarily through seeds and fresh sprouts, and legumes and nuts where available.

Due to their extremely flexible and adaptable nature, parakeets are one of the easiest birds to care for and maintain in captivity. Unfortunately, a lack of knowledge has resulted in poor husbandry practices for most captive birds.

The feeding guidelines below are aimed at providing a wholesome diet to any parakeet that spends time in either permanent captivity or temporary confinement prior to release. Balancing protein requirements are crucial for any living being, esp. for an animal that must have good muscle development prior to release. Providing a varied diet not only offers a change in taste giving the bird something to look forward to but also ensures the intake of various essential oils, vitamins and other nutrients.

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As all cultivated foods are sprayed with many harmful and pesticides please ensure that all fruits and vegetables, including green leafy vegetables, are all washed thoroughly before giving them to your birds.

### Seeds



The primary diet of wild parakeets comprises of seeds. Although wild gathered seeds may be difficult to obtain, several varieties of cultivated seeds be may offered to parakeets.

Sesame seeds (very rich in calcium) – white or black, melon seeds, watermelon seeds, sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, charaunji seeds (*Buchanania lanzan*), millet, etc. can be given to parakeets. They will also happily consume commercial bird seed mixes.



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Melon seeds can also be given fresh; in fact, they relish fresh musk melon seeds.

### Nuts



Although wild parakeets rarely have access to nuts, they may be offered some when in captivity. Cashew nuts, almonds, walnuts, hazel nuts, pistachios, pine nuts, etc. may be offered occasionally in small quantities.



Almonds may also be offered freshly harvested with the green shell as they both enjoy the nut and the process of shelling it. Young and smaller parakeets may be given fresh almonds with some of the shell peeled off as they will find it difficult to shell the entire nut.



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### Boiled eggs

While wild parakeets are not known to consume animal matter, boiled eggs are extremely nutritious for hand-raising young parakeets and are absolutely relished by them. Weak parakeets craving nutrition are also likely to favour eggs until they regain their strength.



Although they will not want egg as frequently, adult parakeets too may be offered boiled eggs twice a week. Eggs must be mashed and may be given with some crushed shell as birds deficient in calcium will be inclined to consume the shells.

### Fruits and berries



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Grapes – both green and black, cherries, pomegranate, apple, pear, figs, banana, lychees, mango, guavas – normally preferred a little raw, apricot, melon – both \*\*musk melon and water melon, peaches, plum, pineapple, neem berries, tamarind, etc. may be given to the birds. Jungle jalebis (*Pithecellobium dulce*) are an absolute favourite and thoroughly enjoyed by parakeets. Fruit must always be offered whole as they will consume the seeds of many fruits.



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\*\* As much as they love musk melon seeds, I don't find them very interested in the fruit itself.

I prefer following a seasonal cycle and offering them whatever is grown locally and available in the market.

### Green leafy vegetables



Captive parakeets must be given at least one green leafy vegetable every other day. Greens like spinach, coriander, lettuce, parsley, etc. may all be given to parakeets.

### Vegetables





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At least one vegetable must be given to the birds every other day. Peas (high in proteins), carrots, potatoes, broccoli, squash, pumpkin, cucumber, baby corn, etc. may all be offered. Parakeets enjoy peas and entire pods may be given to them. Chillies too may be offered occasionally as birds deficient in vitamin C will tend to favour them while others may barely nibble on them.



## Beans and other legumes



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It's no secret that parakeets enjoy eating peanuts but they especially enjoy fresh peanuts in the shells and thoroughly enjoy shelling them for the treats within. Similarly, they enjoy harbara or fresh green chickpeas. Both are absolute seasonal favourites.

Parakeets enjoy all kinds of beans and grams, for example, chickpeas, Bengal gram, kidney beans, lentils, etc. and may be given some occasionally. These may either be soaked overnight before being offered to the birds or they may even be offered cooked – steamed or boiled.

### Grains

Parakeets will also consume grain, both cooked and raw, and will readily consume corn, wheat, oats, millet, rice, etc.

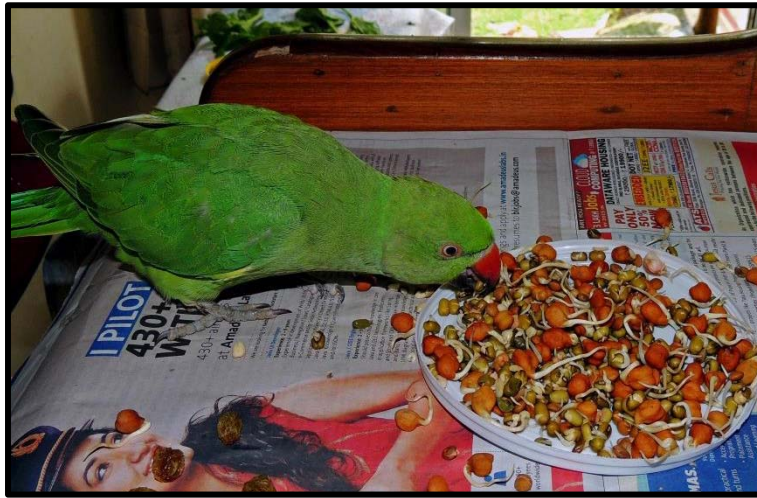
They especially enjoy freshly harvested grain stalks which are both tender and juicy. Corn on the cob, for example, is readily available and easy to provide and can be hung up in the enclosures – they will enjoy the seeds.





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### Sprouted or germinated seeds and legumes



Sprouted or germinated beans, seeds and grains like sprouted mung beans, Bengal gram, peanuts, wheat, etc. can be given to parakeets. They are extremely nutritious, easy to digest and enjoyed by the birds.

### Flowers and buds

Although parakeets don't consume entire flowers or buds, they nibble on them, consuming only small bits of it. Rather than forming an essential part of their diet, this is an important means of providing enrichment.



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### Stalks, twigs and stems

Again, like flowers and buds, rather than being a feeding necessity, these are offered for enrichment. Parakeets have a natural urge to chew on wood and providing soft, chewable stalk and stems satisfies this urge.



Stalks of fruits like grapes, mangoes, lychees, etc. and other trees like neem, gulmohar, etc. can be offered to parakeets and are especially beneficial if the enclosures are devoid of adequate chewing branches.

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### Other treats



Strips of multi-grain bread, cream crackers, chapattis, cooked rice, etc. may be given as treats every once in a while. A little bit of cheese and cottage cheese too is acceptable occasionally in minute quantities. Cuttlebone too may be kept in the enclosures as parakeets requiring additional calcium would benefit from it.

### Feeding regime

Parakeets must be given a variety of 1-2 fruits, 1-2 beans/legumes, some seeds and grains, either a vegetable or a leafy vegetable each day. Nuts and other treats may be given occasionally. Fruits comprise 40-50% of their diet while seeds and legumes comprise 40-60% of their diet.



I prefer keeping a bowl or a tray of dry seeds and grains which I replace with a different combination of seeds/grains twice a week. This ensures



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accessible food at all times while the rotation ensures they always have some different to eat.

Like most other animals, it is important to keep the feeding routine from getting monotonous. To achieve this, I prefer to keep their foods in a rotation. Once a food item has been given, I try not to repeat it for a day or two. This ensures they look forward to what they are served and relish their food with enthusiasm.

While younger parakeets are given easily accessible and chopped fruits, all older birds must be given either whole fruits or large slices that they can fly away with and eat on their perches. It is also a good idea to scatter and hang food around for older birds rather than offering all their food in a tray.

