

A Toy to Destroy...Ideas to Please the Biggest Chewers

by Desi Milpacher

“A toy destroyed is a toy enjoyed.”

The above saying is one echoed by parrot keepers everywhere. A chewing, climbing, foraging parrot is a happy one, and good sense tells us that a happy parrot is a healthy one. As we know, wild parrots are very busy creatures, foraging for and then dismantling foodstuffs in order to get at the choicest and healthiest morsels they need for survival. Instinctively parrots want to work for their food, they *expect* to. They need to manipulate, explore and experiment, because this is how they learn, from a very young age, to care for themselves in the wild.

Pet parrots have no such outlet for their energy, and boredom can result. They often find themselves at the mercy of their humans' schedules: a certain time to eat, a specific time for a bath and playtime. If we, as pet parrot keepers, can fill in the empty times in their day and replace items found in the wild with puzzles, toys, preening items and browse, to some degree we can keep these highly intelligent animals mentally and physically occupied.

A Chewing Parrot is a Happy Parrot

As was said above, parrots love to chew. Their beaks and tongues are built for plucking, working and manipulating fruits, seeds, nuts, leaves, twigs and other natural items. Other than plowing through their breakfast and dinner there isn't much else for a captive parrot to do, since they don't have to forage for their meals. So the daylight hours should be otherwise filled with exercise and toys. A list of chewable toys is a good place to start:

1. Natural branches – Lilac, butterfly bush, grapevine, fir, dogwood, birch, pine, poplar, and willow provide good branches, browse and perches. Remove any sticky sap or wild animal contaminated parts; make sure the branches are not sprayed with pesticides. Make sure there is no mould or fungus. Avoid branches collected near busy roads, as they will have been exposed to salt, grease, oil and other pollutants.
2. Natural pine cones – pick as clean, new and debris free cones as possible. Set out to dry and open up further for a few days, then bake at 200F for 20 minutes to heat sterilize. Shut off oven and let sit in oven for 2 hours to cool off and dry further. Stuff with food items or other chewables.
3. Unbleached paper – end rolls from printing presses work well – make sure it is free of any kind of grease or ink.
4. Sanitary paper and paper towel rolls – cut off any signs of glue, stuff with food items or paper.
5. Dried corncobs – make sure they are free of pests, mould and fungus.
6. Paper Dixie cups – unwaxed, plain paper for stringing on existing toys.
7. Small brown paper sacks – fill with other toys or food items and fold shut.
8. Untreated wood scraps – leftovers from construction projects; make sure they are untreated, have no nails, screws or staples.
9. Dried woven palm leaves (raffia) or sea grass – online bird toy stores have these. Weave them in and out of cage wire.
10. Woven baskets – make sure they're unstained, not painted and contain safe material, such as willow or grapevine.
11. Unbleached, basket-style coffee filters – string into existing or new toys.
12. Wire free clothes pins – again, unstained and unpainted.

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13. Brown paper (in roll) – cut into strips, string onto bird-safe rope (like Paulie rope).
14. Woven finger traps – string onto existing or new toys, stuff with food items.
15. Wooden spoons – drill a hole and attach to toys.
16. Chewable food items – kale, chard and other greens, carrot tops, patty pans, zucchini chunks
17. Small, graphics-free (ink free) boxes – hide other toys or food items in these.
18. Empty cardboard egg cartons (that contained intact eggs, none broken) – cut up into smaller pieces for foot toys or fill cups up with other items.

The items mentioned above are just for a start. The resources mentioned below have more. Just remember, always safety and cleanliness first; when introducing a new toy always supervise for a while to make sure nothing goes awry. And sit back and watch them enjoy!

Next time: foraging and puzzle toys

Sources:

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