

Enrichment Corner: The Toy Box

Simple, homemade chewables

by Desi Milpacher

Birds like to chew

Anyone whose companion parrot owns them (we never *own* a bird!) can attest to the fact that when there are chewables nearby they are dealt with in a manner most swift: wild parrots are natural chewers; they spend their days manipulating and chomping their way through life to get at the foods and other materials they need to survive. And so when they live with us, their caregivers, they need to have an outlet for expressing these latent natural behaviours.

Materials needed

Collect these items, and then use your imagination to build toys to stimulate the natural curiosity and behaviours of your feathered friend.

1. Roll of unbleached paper
2. Brown wrapping paper
3. Pine cones
4. Edibles such as pine nuts, air-popped plain popcorn, roasted unsalted peanuts, bird-safe berries, commercial bird treats
5. Small pine wood shapes (from a safe source: unpainted, unstained, untreated)
6. Stainless steel cage quick links or side mounting nuts and bolts
7. ½ - 1-inch food-grade PVC pipe fittings

What to do with them

Use unbleached paper (some newspaper printers will sell their end rolls after each print is done; make sure it is free of ink) or brown wrapping paper as is, crumpled up into a ball or with items hidden inside (dry edibles such as pine nuts, walnuts (in shell), peanuts (in shell, roasted, unsalted), small tree cones, and other small chewable pine wood shapes. Double wrap with unbleached paper and brown wrapping paper to make it a bit more challenging. Layer treats or small toys between the two papers. For a more three-dimensional shape, string together paper shapes to make a poofy flower (use Paulie rope – available from most online bird toy sites).

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Another fun item: Take PVC pipe-fittings (food-grade is best), then roll up treats, natural fibre finger-catchers and other items inside unbleached paper and stuff into pipe fittings, ensuring that it fits snugly. Watch as they tear the thing apart, and find the surprises inside.

Using paper to make your parrot's cage more interesting is an option. Using balls or strips interwoven and/or stuffed into the cage wire will have a parrot busy for a good while pulling it all apart, as will placing it on the top of the cage, so that he will need to be a little more acrobatic in his work. Or use stainless steel quick links or side mounted nuts and bolts (bird-safe) to attach the balls to the cage wire. Crinkle brown paper strips (slightly thicker paper) to create a different texture.

Pine cones are a wonderful natural item that many parrots love to chew. Collect clean, dry and as close to fresh cones as possible and bake on cookie flats at 200F for 20 minutes, then shut off the oven, leaving the cones inside to cool for 2 hours. Use the cones as is as chew items on the floor of the cage, or wedge into cage wire for more variety. Stuff other items into the cones: pine nuts wrapped in paper (so they don't fall out), other small unsalted nuts, bird-safe berries, rolled up or balled up paper, and small pine wood items. If wet food is used ensure that the cone is removed after a few hours; bacteria can build up when moist food sits.

The best thing about these chewables is that you can let your imagination run wild while creating interesting toys for your bird. But always, ALWAYS remember safety first – prevent feathered loved ones from getting into trouble by anticipating danger areas ahead of time. Then your feathered friends can get the most of their time in your care.

If anyone has any ideas for safe, non-toxic and above all FUN toys, please send them to flocktalk@worldparrottrust.org and we'll have the greatest time going through them and picking out our favourites!