



Cage Hygiene

What do I clean my bird's cage with?

Birds have the misfortune of eating in their bathroom and defecating in their kitchen, therefore it is essential to keep a bird's environment as clean as possible. The bottom of the cage should be lined with a disposable paper such as newspaper or paper towel that can be thrown away every day. Newsprint is now free of lead so should be of little concern. White birds that insist on playing in the newspaper may get gray newsprint on their white feathers but this is easily washed off. The sandpaper that is sold in the pet stores to line the bottom of the cage is of little beneficial value and more expensive. Wood chips and shavings, clay, shredded or recycled paper and corncob bedding are not recommended for many reasons. The dust can be a potential respiratory irritant, especially aromatic pines and cedars. A lot of owners neglect to change the cage daily with these products (it becomes more expensive to throw out daily) leading to increased contamination of the environment. It is virtually impossible to monitor the color, consistency and wetness of the feces that can be an important reflection of the health of the bird. Corn cob can also grow a fungus called aspergillus which can lead to aspergillosis, a potentially fatal infection of the respiratory tract.

Dirt, dust, fecal matter, bits of food and feather dust accumulates constantly on the cage and everything in it. The entire cage should be scrubbed down at least once weekly with soap and hot water plus a good disinfectant. Most disinfectants should be allowed to sit wet for 30 minutes on the surface being cleaned. A thorough fresh water rinse is always advised after application of any soap or disinfectant. Food and water dishes should be cleaned in the same fashion and should be washed daily.

Wood, wicker and bamboo are porous materials that are impossible to sterilize. Dirt and bacteria can penetrate these substances very deeply; therefore it is advisable to replace these items every 6 - 12 months.

What disinfectants?

There are many different kinds of disinfectants available that are capable of killing a variety of germs including viruses, bacteria and fungi. For home use most general disinfectant-deodorizer products are quite adequate. One cup of household chlorine bleach in one gallon of water is considered effective against many organisms. To be most effective, disinfectants should be applied to a washed surface. For aviary or flock situations a broader range disinfectant may be more beneficial. *Discuss your specific needs with your veterinarian.*

Many disinfectants need to be used with great care and may release toxic fumes. They must be used in the absence of the bird and with proper ventilation. ***Remember to rinse well!***

