

Safety First – Bird Toy Tips

What you need to know:

There are three main problems that can make toys dangerous:

- **Toxicity** (poisoning from chemicals or [heavy metals](#) in toys)
- **Entanglement / Strangulation** (getting body parts stuck in toys, or threads wrapped around the neck)
- **Ingestion** (parts can be chewed off toys and swallowed)

Assess the safety of a new toy by supervising your bird's play activities with the toy for the first few days. With certain toys, it is best to always remove them when you are not available to supervise. If you have any doubts about a toy's safety, remove it immediately. Only purchase bird toys from manufacturers that label their toys as lead and zinc free. Stainless steel products are pricey but safe and long-lasting. Check toys daily for missing parts, tear and wear.

Toy Size: The size of the toy should be appropriate for your bird. Small bird toys are not made to withstand the beaks of a larger parrot, who may get hurt by ingesting / swallowing parts of the toy.

Fabrics / Happy Hut / Cage Coverings: Fabric items, such as Happy Huts and cage coverings, can have threads come loose and entangle toes and other body parts. I personally have lost a bird due to strangulation. Happy Huts, or any other fabric-covered sleep tents for birds, are generally quite safe. However, some birds will eat the fuzzy coverings. If fluff is disappearing from your Happy Hut, remove it. This material can cause obstructions and death. Some birds chew holes into the material and get trapped. Any fabric items must be inspected regularly.

- Replace when the fabric gets frayed or torn. I don't recommend Happy Huts for destructive birds.

Ropes, Cords, Strings, Threads: Strangulation and entanglement are common, and yet so avoidable. Keep all cords and ropes short, so that they cannot create a noose around the birds neck or get wrapped around their legs or neck. The thinner the rope, the shorter the rope / string needs to be. Fraying rope and cord are also dangerous because your bird may become caught in them, resulting in injury or in countless cases even death. There have been cases of birds separating the strands on braided ropes, inserting their heads, and strangling themselves as a result.

- **Safe ropes:** Cotton rope toys are best used under supervision as the threads unravel, thus placing your pet at risk of strangulation or entanglement. When the end of a piece of rope begins to unravel, cut it off. Furthermore, cotton rope can be shredded or ingested. Supervised playtime is recommended. Also: a web visitor pointed out the fact that many chemicals are used in growing cotton, and its production is very dangerous for workers and wildlife. Her pet developed a tumor in its crop which could possibly have caused by these chemicals.) Natural Sisal rope is considered a safer alternative, as long as it is oil and pesticide free.

Baby Toys: Baby toys are usually safe to provide to your bird. Do make sure that it is size-appropriate and only use hard plastic toys that don't crack or break when they bite on it. **Make sure they do not contain PVC.**

- Supervision is recommended.

Bells: Strong beaks could remove the clapper and possibly ingest it. Please note that some clappers contain lead or zinc. Round bells are not a good idea because small birds can get their beaks trapped in the spaces where they have been folded into spheres. Spherical bells with slits for openings can trap your bird's beak. The little jingle bells are toe traps and the larger bells frequently have lead clappers, or the clappers can easily be removed and swallowed by the inquisitive parrot.

- If your bird likes to chew / take things apart, either remove any bells or at least the clapper. Supervise play.

Chains: Metal or plastic chains with small gaps in the links are a risk for snaring toenails and breaking limbs. Also watch for links that are large enough to trap your bird's feet or head.

Clips and Rings: Lanyard-type clips (tear-drop shaped) can trap beaks and toenails. **Split rings** (key chain rings) are also notorious for trapping beaks on parrots. C-links or "Quick Links" are a much safer choice, as long as you avoid those containing zinc. Unless the manufacturer specifies them to be safe for bird use, replace with safe alternatives. Be watchful of your bird chewing on anything metallic. Even if the coating is safe, if they chew through it, they will be exposed to the metals beneath. Metals should be checked regularly for wear and oxidation.

Dyes and Other Chemicals: Avoid toys that use glues, adhesives, lacquers, paints, chemical / toxic dyes, and chemically tanned leather products.

Leather: Leather should be either untreated or vegetable-tanned / dyed (Tanning is a soaking process that converts animal skin to leather. It is usually done with acidic chemicals but vegetable tanned leather is soaked in tannins made from plant matter and are free of dangerous chemicals.)

Plastic / Acrylic Toys: Strong acrylic toys are considered fairly safe; however, you need to make sure that your bird is not destroying the toy, potentially swallowing any pieces.

Wood Toys: Birds love to chew on wood, therefore, the wood should be either untreated or colored with vegetable-based dyes. Chewing is an excellent exercise for their beaks and keeps them entertained. However, the wood should be non-toxic (SEE LIST FURTHER DOWN, OF SAFE WOODS) and make sure that your birds are not swallowing sharp splinters.

PVC / Soft Plastic and Vinyl Toys: This material is toxic when ingested. Toy companies have discontinued many baby toys that use polyvinyl chloride, which could even be found in products specifically made for babies, such as teethingers. If you have bought children's toys for your birds, make sure they do not contain PVC.

Should not be used for birds who like to chew on things.

Flavored Toys: May be toxic. Avoid if your bird likes to chew things.

sources: Species Research by [Sibylle Johnson](#) Beauty of Birds website

- Bird toys **should never have painted surfaces or use glues to hold pieces together.**
- **Metal hardware should be stainless steel or nickel plated.** The hardware pieces should not be removable and ingestible or be shaped in ways or have crevices that might get stuck on a beak or nail.
- **Jack chain** is VERY dangerous, so do not purchase toys hung with Jack chain (a twisted, non-welded, 3 ply chain link).
- **Wire coat hangers and Shower curtain hangers ARE NOT SAFE.**
- **All metal hardware should be lead and zinc free,** including bells. Beware of the clappers inside of bells. These can be removed easily by most birds and accidentally swallowed. Round rings should be too large or too small for your birds beak, head, and toes to catch.

- **Leather pieces and strips should NOT be dyed and should be vegetable tanned.** Other tanning processes use chemicals that are toxic to birds. Rawhide should be un-bleached.
- **Proper Size:** Toys which are too small or include too small parts may pose safety concerns. Smaller pieces can be easily broken and accidentally swallowed. **Avoid small beads for larger birds.**
- **Avoid “loops” that the bird could get their head into...**no necklaces...strangle danger!

SAFE WOOD

Birds need to chew, wood is an excellent material to satisfy this natural urge. Birds play most often with wood toys. Wooden toys are meant to be destroyed. It is important to know what woods are safe for your bird. Both soft and hardwoods are commonly used in toys.

Safe Woods (not a complete list):

Pine, Balsa, Birch, Basswood, Poplar, Maple, Walnut, Ash, Apple, Elm, Cactus (Cholla) and Manzanita

Unsafe Woods (not a complete list): Cedar, Red Cherry, Plywood, Oak

If you like to make your own toys **NEVER use pressure treated wood**, it is treated with arsenic and will poison your bird. **If using natural branches make sure they have not been exposed to insecticides.** Also, take care to collect branches in areas removed from highways where plant life may have absorbed toxic emissions from cars. **Scrub all branches with a non-toxic disinfectant (dilute chlorine bleach), rinse and dry thoroughly.**

Ideas:









**Fill with nuts, millet, Chex,
Kix, Cheerios or any of your
birds favorite treats**