

Why Should I Sprout For My Birds?

Susan Buzzelli of [Chew Too Toys](#)

Compiled from many different sources, from many knowledgeable aviculturists, over 28 years of caring for my feathered friends.

Healthy, viable grains, seeds and legumes are just waiting to burst forth, releasing their dormant potential. With a little water, warmth and air it all happens quite naturally with very little effort on our part. (This is also a good way to check the quality and freshness of the seed you buy for your birds) If it can't be sprouted then it probably is no longer viable or able to provide useful nourishment for your birds and they might as well be eating dirt.

How do you sprout?

There are different ways to sprout. There's the Easy Sprouter available from [sproutpeople.com](#).

You can use a quart or half gallon Mason jar and a circle of screen mesh (preferably fiberglass, plastic or plastic coated, to prevent rust) cut to fit the lid. Fill your jar not quite half full with dried sproutable seeds and beans. Rinse the sprout mix well until the water runs clear. Then fill the jar the rest of way full with water. Soak the seeds for 12 to 24 hours. Start them soaking first thing in the morning and drain them the next morning. Drain all the water out (spin, shake, bounce and twirl your sprouter-just get as much water out as you can.) Fill again with fresh water, add 1 tablespoon of Apple Cider Vinegar (Bragg's organic Apple Cider Vinegar) soak for 10 minutes and then rinse 3 times till water runs clear. Make sure that you put them in a dry place out of direct sunlight. The little sprouts should be visible within 24 hours. When they are about 1/8 to 1/4 inch long I serve. The sprouts will keep for several days in refrigerator. I use a 3 gallon Rubbermaid container but then I am feeding over 100 birds. I have 3 containers of sprout mix going at different stages at all times.

The Basics of Sprouting

Rinsing: Water is the key ingredient in sprouts. Use liberally, rinsing thoroughly grows better sprouts! But when you rinse thoroughly you must DRAIN just as thoroughly after rinsing. Sitting in a puddle is the common cause of crop failure. **Air Circulation:** If your sprouts can't breathe while growing-they can die. Don't put them in a closed cabinet or such. **Cleanliness:** The sprouting device should be clean, wash it well between crops, diluted Clorox bleach is good for this.

Storage: Properly stored, fresh sprouts will keep very several days in your refrigerator, but fresh is better. Safety concerns with ordinary measures of safe food handling and hygiene, sprouts will grow without the risk of fungal contamination; which is why I recommend Bragg's Organic Apple Cider Vinegar. For one thing it has the mother lode in it; it is a natural way to fight the fungal problem. A lot of aviculturists in warm climates actually use it in their water for the birds on a regular basis.

What can I sprout?

Always be sure that the seeds, grains or legumes have not been commercially treated with anti-fungals or other chemicals. Buy Organic when you can.

- Barley: Use only unhulled barley; "whole" hulled barley and pearled barley will not sprout. Hulls are tough but parrots do not mind.
- Buckwheat: Use raw buckwheat that is white, green, or light brown; unsproutable toasted buckwheat is medium brown.
- Field corn: Soak for 12-18 hours. Very hard corn and slow to germinate, but a favorite of most parrots.
- Popcorn: Soak for 12-18 hours. Popcorn sprouts are very sweet. The use of popcorn saves washing several times as required to clean most field corn.
- Millet: Unhulled millet is the best sprouter.
- Oats: Must use unhulled oats. So-called "whole oats" or oat groats will not sprout.
- Rice: Only brown, unprocessed rice will sprout.
- Triticale: Cross between rye and wheat.
- Wheat, including Kamut and Spelt: Hard Winter wheat sprouts better than soft Spring wheat.
- Almonds: Soak 8-12 hours. Use only unblanched almonds. Sprouting and storage time should not exceed two days or sprouts may turn rancid. Most almonds do not actually develop a sprout as such, but merely swell. One of the tastiest soaked seeds, especially loved by eclectus parrots!
- Cabbage and Kale: Very strong flavored sprouts. Can also be grown into greens. Fenugreek: Slightly bitter, fenugreek sprouts are a good digestive aid, good for the liver, and good for clearing up mucus conditions.
- Mustard: Available in three forms: black, brown, yellow. Brown seeds are smaller and harder to handle in mixtures; yellow or black recommended for mixtures. Can grow as greens also.
- Pumpkin: True sprouting (developing a root) by pumpkin seeds is quite rare. Bacterial spoilage and rancidity can be a problem when you try to sprout them. Best to simply soak them and feed.
- Organic Broccoli seeds
- Radish: Very hot flavor much loved by parrots!
- Sesame: Soak 2-4 hours. Must use unhulled sesame seeds for sprouting. Sesame sprouts are delicious at one day but continue to grow while refrigerated and start to get bitter by the second day.
- Sunflower: Use hulled or unhulled, black oil or grey striped sunflower seeds. They have an earthy flavor and are very popular in the aviary.
- Quinoa: Soak 2-4 hours. Very fast sprouter. White and black quinoa are available. This has become a favorite sprouting food of many aviculturists. Alan Lipsig says of quinoa: "I usually set it up for sprouting before I go to bed, 1/3 grain to 2/3 water, and by the time I wake up, the water is gone and the container is full of hairs (new sprouts). When I feed, I mix my soak with chopped fresh, and spread some sprouts on each bowl. My birds seem to like it, but they're raised on fresh from the time they start eating on their own."

LEGUMES:

- Adzuki beans: Easiest to sprout of all beans.
- Garbanzo beans or chick peas: Make enough to feed birds only one day at a time as they spoil quickly. Many birds prefer mung bean sprouts but most Eclectus parrots have a definite preference for sprouted Garbanzo beans or chick peas.

- • Lentils, brown, green and red: The brown and green lentils come in a variety of sizes; the smaller sizes generally sprout faster. Red lentils are usually sold in split form and for sprouting you must buy whole lentils. Lentil sprouts have a spicy flavor and are relished by parrots.
- Mung beans: This is a favorite sprout of most parrots and people too.
- Peas-garden dried green peas-these guys get quite a tail on them and are relished by my birds even the cockatiels.

NOTE: Many people have fed all of the beans in their sprouted form without problem. However, large raw beans such as Anasazi, Black, Fava, Kidney, Lima, Navy, Pinto, and Soy can cause problems of toxicity and digestive upsets for people and perhaps for birds. Except for soy sprouts (edible raw if grown long enough), these beans should be cooked to be digestible and are not recommended for general sprouting purposes. Soy sprouts, however, are high in isoflavones, SOD (superoxide dismutase), a very powerful and important antioxidant with essential fatty acids and lecithin.

Whether we sprout in the traditional manner or grow sprouted greens by using small amounts of soil, our birds will display the benefits in shinier feathers, brighter eyes, more energy and higher production in breeding birds. There is no doubt that healthier parrots are more likely to be successful breeders. Fruits and vegetables certainly are an important component of the diet of parrots, but once they are harvested, they start to lose nutritional value.

SEED SPROUTING TIPS

Germination declines with time.

When seeds no longer sprout they can still be prepared in other ways in our cooked diet. The longer sprouts grow the more flavor they have.

Mung Bean sprouts grow bitter as green chlorophyll develops.

Alfalfa seeds make the most delicious sprouts. A few seeds go a long way!

Mung Bean Sprouts are typically found in a lot of Chinese Foods.

Growing Sprouts is like a work of art, it doesn't always result in perfection.

For more information on different diets: Join feeding feathers a yahoo group. www.feedingfeathers.com