

Changing Your Canary's Diet from Seeds to Pellets

Canaries are wonderful pets, but the constant litter of seed husks can be a tiresome mess. One answer is to change your bird over to eating pellets instead of seed.

Most canary pellets are multicolored and seed sized. Each pellet is the same nutritionally regardless of color. Most are made of corn and soy products with added vitamins and minerals. Pellets provide your canary with a more balanced and fortified diet than seed alone can provide. Best of all the bird eats the whole pellet. There are no shells or husks left behind with which to deal each day. Pellets do not go stale as seed can and pellets can be kept frozen in an airtight container until needed. There are several different pellet brands on the market: Pretty Bird, Zupreem, L'Avian, Kaytee, and Roudybush.

Regardless of how much you may want your canary to begin eating pellets the process of getting him to accept them as food can be challenging. Usually the conversion process takes approximately a month. Success is achieved by slowly replacing the seed with pellets. Keep in mind that if a canary doesn't recognize the pellets as food he won't eat them. This instinct to not eat the unfamiliar is very strong. You will need to slowly introduce your bird to pellets. Be prepared for initial rejection.

Decide before you begin the conversion process if you **really** want to have your canary on a diet of pellets. There are definite nutritional and convenience benefits for doing so, but the bird's instinct to eat seed may be stronger than your desire that it eat pellets. Given a choice most canaries will eat seed, not pellets. It is pointless to go through the month long process and then offer the bird a diet of seeds **and** pellets. He will eat the seed. Once you have decided in favor of pellets there are several tricks you can use to get your canary eating them.

Week 1: Make up a mixture of 3 parts of the seed mixture to which your canary is accustomed and 1 part pellets. If you are working with one bird, use ½ Tablespoon as a measure. Stir the seeds and pellets together and store in a small covered container. Replace the bird's regular seed mix with this pellet/seed mix. Use the same food container located in the usual place familiar to your bird. This mix should remain available to the canary for most of every day. Each day empty the food container and replace with the mixture you have prepared ahead of time. Save what you empty out (unless it is fouled) as you can use it later when you change the seed to pellet ratio. At first your canary will eat most of the seed and very few of the pellets. Each day give him 1 Tablespoon of the 3 to 1 mixture. If you actually measure out how much you give the bird you can more easily keep track of how much of the mixture he is eating as time goes by. Continue having this mixture available to the bird daily.

Just before the bird goes to sleep for the night remove all of the food containers from the cage. The next morning approximately ½ hour before you uncover the cage to start his day, measure out 1 teaspoonful of pellets into a small dish or container. Stir in ½ teaspoon of applesauce. Set aside for 30 minutes. During the 30 minutes the pellets will be greatly softened and will smell of apple which is very attractive to most canaries. This should greatly increase the chances of your bird tasting the mixture. Getting a bird that isn't used to pellets as food to at least try them is half the battle. Many canaries especially like the taste of apples so softening the pellets with applesauce makes the pellets more appealing. Your canary will be hungry as his day starts. Since you have removed all of his other food the night before his only option is to try the softened pellets. Put the teaspoonful of pellets softened with applesauce into the cage as soon as the bird awakens. Give him ½ hour to at least try the softened pellets, and then put in his regular seed cup containing the 75% seed - 25% pellet combination. If at the end of 30 minutes he has eaten at least ½ of the softened pellets leave them in his cage for the remainder of the day. If he has not eaten at least ½ of them remove and discard them to prevent him from eating spoiled food. Continue this routine of early morning softened pellets for the first week.

Many canary fanciers enjoy giving their bird daily treats of various kinds. These treats may be either seed based such as millet sprays or honey sticks or bells, or fresh fruit or vegetable treats. You may continue this routine during his conversion to pellets if you wish, but reduce the amount to approximately ½ teaspoon per day of seed treats or a piece of fresh food about ½ the size of your pinky finger. You want him to eat the pellets, not fill up on other food, which he will do if given the option.

Week 2 Increase the dry pellets to seed ratio to 50/50 and continue the early morning softened pellets routine. You can use the pellet / seed mixture that you have reserved from the daily emptying of the food cup of the first week to make the 50/50 mixture. Mix a small amount of a 50/50 mixture to get an idea of how it should look. Remove the hulls from what was set aside during the first week, and simply add seed to the saved mix to make it look the same as the 50/50 mix that you actually measured. The measurement does not need to be absolutely precise.

As an alternative to softening the pellets with applesauce you can also make a mixture of frozen vegetable and pellets that may also entice your bird into eating them. The objective to altering the dry pellets

mixture is to get your bird to realize that pellets are food. One advantage of the frozen vegetable/pellet mixture is that it can be made up ahead of time and kept frozen or refrigerated. This can be a time saver.

Put 1/3 cup mixed vegetables or peas and carrots in a dish. Allow to thaw for 15 minutes. The vegetables need to be only partially thawed before you mix them with the pellets or you won't get the texture desired for the finished product. Dump the partially thawed vegetables into a food processor and immediately add 1/3 cup pellets. Run the processor for 15 – 20 seconds. If you have to use a blender run it for only 10 seconds. You want to have the vegetables chopped into tiny pieces and thoroughly mixed with the pellets, which will be broken into even smaller pieces by the processor (blender) action. You don't want mush.

Remove the mixture into a small covered container and refrigerate overnight (or for at least 8 hours). The pellets will soften by absorbing moisture from the vegetables. If your bird doesn't like the vegetables you have chosen try using 1/3 cup finely chopped fresh broccoli. If only frozen broccoli is available reduce the amount to ¼ cup as the frozen product usually contains more water. This mixture can also be stored frozen for use as you need it. Use the pellet-vegetable mixture in the same way and in the same amounts as described above for the applesauce-softened product. You can pamper your bird by alternating between the two mixtures.

Week 3 Hopefully by now, after all of the work you have gone to, your canary is accepting the fact that pellets are food and that, in fact, they aren't so bad to eat. Increase the dry pellet/seed mixture to 75% pellets and only 25% seed, and continue the softened pellets if you are concerned that your bird isn't eating enough. Base your decision on whether or not to bother continuing with the softened pellet mixture each morning on how much of the dry pellet-seed mixture the bird is eating during the day. If he is eating at least 1/3 of the pellet/seed mixture (1 teaspoon) each day you don't need to continue the softened early morning feeding. The softened mixture is good for him and it won't hurt him to continue it as a treat if you have the inclination to do so. If you decide to continue with it reduce the amount to ½ teaspoon and use it as an occasional treat.

Week 4: And so it is "cold turkey" time. Put 1 Tablespoon of pellets in the food cup (straight pellets - no seed mixed in with it). Pay particular attention the first day your canary is on 100% pellets to be sure he is eating. He may plow around in the pellets looking only for the seeds. If you are concerned that he may not eat, start this stage on a day when you are around the bird all day so that you can monitor what is going on. With some birds it is obvious – you can see them eating the pellets. Others are more shy and don't want to eat when you are looking. Wait half a day and measure the amount of pellets that are left so you can actually tell if he is eating them. On rare occasions you may need to repeat the whole 4 week process of conversion. It has also been known to happen that right from week 1 the bird shows a preference for pellets. Generally what has happened is that he was fed pellets at some point in his life before you got him and already likes them. If such is the case a prolonged switching over process is unnecessary.

Pellet fed birds may be given seed as a treat. Soak seed, sprout seed, condition food, shredded wheat, song seed, or any number of fresh fruits and vegetables are great treats. No avocado and no chocolate – they are poisonous to canaries!

Keep a supply of pellets in his food cup and simply check daily that there are, in fact, some in there. When necessary add more. There is no need to discard uneaten pellets as they do not spoil or go stale assuming they stay dry. Some canaries develop a liking for certain colors of pellets refusing to eat a color they don't fancy. Each pellet contains the same nutritional ingredients regardless of color so let him eat whatever he pleases.

Feeding a diet of pellets together with being sure your bird gets 12 –13 hours of pitch black sleep time can go a long way toward keeping him healthy and singing lustily.