

**ANIMAL TALK**  
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**American Singer Canary**  
*Serinus canaria*



**Necessities:**

- Cage
- Bedding
- Seed/Zupreem® Pellets
- Mineral block or Cuttlebone
- Millet spray

**Extras:**

- Perches
- Toys
- Treats

**General:**

Canaries, native to the Canary Islands, are often chosen as pets because of the male's beautiful "song". For this they have even received the name "American Singer Canary". These birds are very small and aren't a "hands-on" bird like most parrots, but they are fun to watch and listen to and come in many different colors including bronze, orange, fawn, white, brown, buff, blue (grey), blue and white, green, and cinnamon. They can live up to ten years in captivity (10-15 on pellet diets). Although they live in flocks in the wild, the males DO NOT like to be housed together. Males and females can live together. The male sings to attract the female and to define his territory, so if he is living with a female he doesn't need to sing. A lot can be said for male competition, too! If you really love to hear them sing, two males in separate cages across the room from each other can be a never-ending competition of song.

Following you will find instructions that will help to make the transition from our home to yours less stressful for you and your new family member.

**Handling/Exercise AND Singing:**

While canaries can't easily be handled and - given the choice - won't generally get close to people, they need lots of space and love to fly around, so the bigger the cage the better! Free flight in a bird-safe room is a possibility but comes with a risk: they may hit a wall or a window a little to hard.

They love toys! Variety is important and different birds can have different tastes. Switch them out regularly and check them for stray strings or broken parts. They can get bored so change the toys and try new ones on occasion. You can always reintroduce older toys later and the bird will think it's a new one.

The main reason people enjoy canaries is their song. Males are the strongest singers but over the years I have had a more than a few really good singing females. Canaries imitate what they hear. If they only hear a telephone or alarm system, that is exactly what they will sound like. Classical music or prepared Canary CD's help to keep the songs interesting and varied! Each year when they molt they stop singing but usually will start up again after the stress of making and molting new feathers is over with. Molting for all birds usually begins after winter solstice when the days start getting longer. Their bodies start forming the new feathers. For canaries this is a great time to add color food to their diet, especially for the "red factors". They will start molting out their old feathers when the days start getting warmer. Unfortunately they can forget their song during this time so encouragement with music is very helpful.

**Housing & Bedding:**

The cage should be large enough to allow the bird to spread its wings and move freely about the cage even with an assortment of toys. 12"x14"x16" would be the absolute smallest. Bigger is always better! If you are getting more than one bird, the cage MUST be bigger. They love to hop from perch to perch and to fly around. The cage should be placed in a well-lit, smoke-free, draft-free environment away from cats or dogs, outside of the kitchen and not in direct sunlight. Remember that they are very social and do not like to be away from the family.

Set up the cage the way you'll want it with the food, water and toys. We recommend a staggered arrangement of the perches, i.e. the lowest ones towards the front on the lowest section of the cage close to the food dishes (this keeps the top wire of the cage attached to the bottom plastic base) and the next perch up on the next cross bar about four inches further back and at least four inches away from the back of the cage (this helps to prevent their tail from becoming frayed from rubbing against the back). If the seed cups have covers, remove them until the bird is comfortable and eating well. Initially it is helpful to put a millet spray on the side of the topmost perch and to cover up that half of the cage with a towel for a little security.

Do not use newspapers on the bottom of the cage as the ink is toxic and it will discolor the bird and cage. We recommend using paper towels and changing daily. This way you can check their droppings each day. A change in their droppings can be the first sign of an illness. You can also use Carefresh® paper bedding, but it should be changed at least once a week. Most cages come with a grate at the bottom to prevent the birds from picking at food that has been polluted or from chewing on their own droppings, but the grate must be kept clean and can be difficult to remove from the cage. If you cannot keep it clean, just remove it, use paper towels and make sure to change the paper daily. We recommend using a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach and 9 parts water) when cleaning the cage. Other cleaning products leave toxic residues. Always rinse thoroughly. This should be done at least once a week. Keep the box that we sent the bird home in to put the bird in when you clean its cage with this solution.

Place the bird very gently in the cage. The box we send the bird home in has an end marked for opening. Place this end up close to the door, have someone hold open the door and open the end into the cage. The bird will fly into the light. This is especially important if you have opted to not have the wings clipped. A scared bird in a new environment can hit a wall hard. Allow the bird 24-48 hours of quiet before beginning to handle. It is very important that he/she begin eating within 24 hours. If he/she does not begin to eat within this time PLEASE call us immediately! Birds do not store enough body fat to go for extended periods of time without eating and drinking.

#### **Diet:**

The bird should have fresh food and water available to it at all times. Use only filtered water and change daily. We recommend filtered water because birds are very susceptible to the additives in tap water and the bacteria that makes it through the system. If the bird is still on seed it should be freshened daily by cleaning out the empty hulls. Birds have been known to starve with a full dish of seed just because they couldn't see the seed under all of the empty hulls. Pellets should be replenished and fruits and veggies replaced. Here at the store we try to get all birds moved off of seed by mixing Zupreem® Fruit Blend pellets into their seed, eventually moving them off of seed entirely. Once they are solidly on the Zupreem® Fruit Blend pellets we will slowly move them onto either the Lafebbers® or Roudybush® pellets. Pellet diets are much healthier for your pet and can double their lifespan! Seeds are like eating cheesecake day in and day out. For more information refer to our information sheet "Feeding for a Healthier Bird".

Here is a list of foods that we feed to our canaries: Canary diet, Zupreem®, Lafebbers® or Roudybush® pellets, Crazycorn® cooking mix, whole grain breads, oranges, apples, millet spray, cuttlebone, romaine lettuce, kale, collard greens, mustard greens and fresh sprouts. You will find many other suggestions in your book and our webpage. Suggested reading: Barron's® "The New Canary Handbook."

#### **Heating & Lighting:**

Canaries do not like to go below 68° F at night and can overheat at 90° F. If you are worried about temperatures please call us so we can help you. We also recommend covering the cage at night so the bird is not startled by car headlights flashing by or sudden cool drafts.

Birds generally do not require extra lighting other than the ambient light in the room, but it should be light during the day and dark at night to allow for a normal sleep and eating cycle. If you feel that your home is too dark your bird can benefit from UVB and UVA lighting designed for reptiles.

#### **Health & Wellbeing:**

It is very important to monitor your bird's eating habits and its droppings for any change. If you have just gotten your bird from us and you feel that the bird is not eating enough or the droppings are loose or that it is inactive in any way PLEASE call us immediately! We have a 2-week health guarantee on all of our pets. If you have had your bird longer, you are still welcome to call us with any questions. Act quickly! Birds by nature hide all signs of illness. By the time you notice a change, the situation can be very serious.

Also be aware of airborne toxins and fumes such as air fresheners, incense, fumes from household cleaners, neighbors spraying insecticide, fumes from home improvements such as new carpets, paint, glues, wood floor finishes, etc. DO NOT use hand sanitizers! Soap and water is always the best. For these reasons also we do not recommend leaving your bird alone for a weekend in a closed-up home. If you purchased your bird from us, we do provide boarding accommodations. Just give us a call! Our favorite veterinarian is Dr. Obegi at Allpet Vet - 206-365-1102.