

Perch Mix Recipe

Papagena gets a basic diet of a bean mixture that we cook up and freeze, until it's breakfast time. Here's the recipe from *Katy McElroy of the Hornbeam Aviary*:

Perch Mix

Bean, rice and corn diets are widely considered to be one of the best means of supplying good natural nutrition to parrots. They are excellent for pets, breeder birds or weaning chicks, and wonderful for converting seed junkies. They work well for a few birds when the cooked mixture is frozen in serving-sized bags, but many breeders find it difficult to cope with the amounts necessary to feed a whole aviary. I have been feeding this mix for many years with good results and after much trial and error have developed an easy, nearly painless cooking method. I make 12 quarts of this mix two or three times a week. It takes about 1½ hours from start to finish with very little fuss, uses just one pot and doesn't need pre-soaking or draining. I use a 16-quart stainless steel stockpot for both cooking and storing the mix. It will keep at least 4 days in the fridge. I buy the ingredients in bulk from a local food service and local feed store.

If one part is equal to a level ½ cup measure (4 ounces), you'll end up with about 5 quarts of food.

INGREDIENTS:

4 parts whole shelled field corn (from your feed store)

4 parts dried beans (I use a mixture of black-eyed peas, great northern beans and green split peas because they cook in about the same length of time. Pintos and other dark beans tend to stain the whole mix brown, which may make it less inviting to some birds.)

4 parts chopped carrots (or yams, winter squash, or pumpkin – all unpeeled)

Crushed egg shells, dried hot peppers, cinnamon stick, garlic cloves to taste (all optional)

5 parts water

2 parts plain long grain white rice (not quick-cooking)

3 parts thin egg noodles or any *thin* uncooked pasta

4 parts rolled oats (the long-cooking Quaker type)

1 part raisins

4 parts frozen green peas

COOKING METHOD:

Measure the field corn into the stockpot, rinse with water and drain. Add the beans, optional items, and the measured water. At this point your pot should be no more than 1/3 full or you won't have enough mixing room.

Put on the lid and bring to a full rolling boil over high heat. Stir in the rice and yams/ winter squash/carrot/pumpkin mix and reduce heat to very low for 25 to 35 minutes or until the rice is almost done. Don't lift the lid for the first 25 minutes that the rice is steaming and don't add more water.

When the rice is almost tender, turn off the heat and stir in the pasta, rolled oats and raisins. Leave the lid on for about 10 or 15 minutes while the pasta and oats steam and absorb the remaining moisture, stirring a couple of times in between. In 10 or 15 minutes the noodles will be softened (they'll still be a bit leathery) and you can stir in the frozen peas.

The mix should be dry and fluffy – not wet or sticky – and very little should be stuck to the bottom of the pot after it cools. The beans and corn will range from crisp-tender to crunchy, depending on the type used. Nothing should be overcooked or mushy. Cool the pot quickly – in a sink full of cold water if necessary – and refrigerate. Lay a couple of paper towels on top of the mix under the lid to absorb dripping condensation.

Mixed in with the bean mixture we also add a couple spoonfuls of various types of fruits and vegetables – kale, yellow squash, zucchini, carrots, yellow/red/green bell pepper, jalepeno, apple, broccoli – all washed carefully and given a pulse chop by our food processor. (It should be noted that we have not used our food processor for any other purpose other than bird food.) We found that mixing the all-important fruits and veggies to the basic protein bean mix makes it more palatable to the birds. We used to cut the fruits and veggies into small pieces and put them on a skewer, but they grew tired of that.

We also fortify this mixture a couple of times per week with a pinch or so of calcium additive, formulated expressly for birds. Eclectus and African Greys need adequate calcium (along with as much natural sunshine as possible) to keep strong bones.

We give the birds filtered water in water bottles. At night, just before putting them in their sleep cages, they usually enjoy being given water out of a cup.

For snacks, we usually allow a walnut or a couple of almonds. We prefer the nuts in their shells, rather than giving them unshelled nuts. Nuts are oily, so we limit them. Plus, they'll occasionally join us at the dinner table and it's kind of fun watching them try out various types of people food. Papagena loves mashed potatoes and Daffy is bonkers over chicken. They both like to crunch on and eat chicken bones, extracting the marrow.

