

Sprouting Made Simple

The main purpose of this article is not to convince you to feed sprouts to your birds. There are numerous articles on the Internet about the nutritional value of sprouts. The purpose of this article is to provide a quick and easy set of sprouting instructions for those of you who have been confused or have felt that sprouting was complicated and difficult. Sprouting is EASY!

I will, however, say one thing about the benefits of sprouting. Trying sprouted and germinated seeds is a great way to move a bird off of a seed-only diet. Most birds who eat only seed will find germinated seeds close enough that they will readily eat them. As the days and weeks go on, slowly allow sprouts to sprout longer and longer for each serving, until your bird is eating completely sprouted seeds and trying sprouted grains and legumes.



Equipment

- One small, wide-mouthed Mason jar.
- One sprouting screen (see end of article for where to purchase).
- Organic sprouting seeds, grains, nuts, and legumes (see end of article for where to purchase).
- White-distilled vinegar (optional spray bottle for it).
- Hydrogen peroxide (optional spray bottle for it).
- Grapefruit Seed Extract (GSE) (optional for soaking).

There are other sprouting kits on the market, but I have found the small, wide-mouthed Mason jars to be the easiest for sprouting and for getting the sprouts out of the container. And, they are less than \$1.00 each if you buy them by the dozen or so. They are also excellent for storing pellets.

Process

Step 1: Put Seeds in Jar and Inspect

Use quality, whole, unbroken, organic seeds, grains, and legumes. Remove seeds that are broken or damaged. Measure about 1 teaspoon per bird (but you can experiment over time) and put into a small, wide-mouthed Mason jar.

Step 2: Spray and Soak

To remove any bacteria, be sure to spray seeds with white-distilled vinegar, hydrogen peroxide, or both. Add a little pure, filtered water and soak for a minute, and rinse.

Step 3: Rinse Well

Using pure, filtered water (which can be cold, tepid, or warm), rinse well until the rinse water runs clear. Do rinse gently so that you do not damage the seeds.

Step 4: Soak

Soak in pure, filtered water for about 8 to 12 hours (overnight is easy or while at work). Use enough water so that the level is above the top of the seeds, to allow for swelling. If you use a tablespoon of sprouts, you can use about a 1/3 cup of water.

If you are concerned about safety, you can add antibacterial solutions to the water. To do this, use one tablespoon of GSE per gallon of pure water. Thus, if you are using a small Mason jar, a drop of GSE should be enough.

Step 5: Rinse and Drain

After you have soaked the sprouts for 8 to 12 hours, rinse and drain. Thoroughly drain out all the water.

Step 6: Allow to Germinate

Some sprouts (especially seeds) only need to soak overnight to germinate. Others should be allowed to sprout; for example, legumes should be sprouted before serving. Grains can be given germinated or sprouted. If your bird is transitioning from a seed-only diet, try serving germinated seeds.

Once the seeds have germinated or sprouted, handle them gently so that the delicate new sprouts are not damaged (which can cause spoilage).

Step 7: Rinse, Rinse, Rinse

You can serve some seeds germinated. If you want to continue to sprout, follow the instructions in the next step, "Allow to Sprout" and be sure to rinse and drain often until they are sprouted. Try to rinse and drain at least several times a day.

Step 8: Allow to Sprout

Allow drained seeds to sprout in a well-ventilated area that is not in bright light. You can turn the jar upside down while sprouting to allow them to drain well. Sprouting time varies according to the seeds. Sprouts are ready to harvest when the tiny white sprout tails first appear on them. Most are ready after allowing to sprout for 8 to 12 hours. Some may take longer. Be sure that the tiny white sprout tails are just peeking through and do not become too long. If sprout tails are long, the sprouts lose nutrition.

Step 9: Serve

Before serving to your birds, it is best to drain the sprouts until they are dry. Dry sprouts (unlike wet food) can be left in your birds' dish during the day without fear of spoilage. If you are serving sprouts with wet or cooked food, you can serve them wet. Just be sure not to let them sit out after the meal.

If you are extra concerned about safety, you can spray the sprouts with apple cider vinegar before serving. We do this with our vegetables too.

If your bird is new to sprouts, you can entice him to eat by adding small pellets or vegetables.

Step 10: Refrigerate Leftovers

Sprouts will keep for several days in the refrigerator.

Where to Purchase Sprouting Seeds

You can purchase organic seeds, grains, and legumes from your local health food store or you can buy them from places that sell organic sprouts. Whether or not you order sprouts from places on the Internet, I find them a good inspiration for making my own mixes.



BSA

BSA does not seem to be in business any longer but they had some of my favorite sprouting mix combinations, which you can recreate if you can find the seed.

I especially loved the sprouts combination in their small bird mix, which contained organic Alfalfa, Amaranth, Broccoli, Buckwheat, Fennel, Fenugreek, Flax, Hulled Sunflower, Lentils, Mustard, Oat Groats, Red Clover, Red or White Quinoa, Sesame. It also includes non-organic Safflower seed.

The medium bird mix contained organic Adzuki, Alfalfa, Amaranth, Broccoli, Buckwheat, Fenugreek Seed, Flax Seed, Garbanzo Beans, Green Peas, Hulled Pumpkin, Hulled Sunflower, Kamut, Lentils, Mung, Oat Groats, Red Clover Seed, Quinoa, Sesame. It also includes the non-organic Safflower seed.

China Prairie

China Prairie sells Avian FRESH Diet-Micrograin formula that includes sprouting seeds that can be either germinated or sprouted. The 15 sprouting items included in AFD-Micrograin are: Triticale, Rice, Millet, Alfalfa, Fenugreek, Buckwheat, Fennel, Flax Seed, Dill Seed, Sesame Seed, Amaranth, Quinoa, Mung Bean, Radish Seed, and Red Clover Seed. You can get this at <http://www.chinaprairie.com/afd.html>

Grey Feather Toys

Grey Feather toys:

<http://www.greyfeathertoys.com>

sells an organic sprouting mix, **Delightfully Spicy Sprouts**, with some of the harder to find sprouts: Lentils, Radish, Alfalfa, Canola, and Black Mustard. All Organic!

Totally Organics

Totally Organics has seed mixes for sprouting with an emphasis on grains:

<http://totallyorganics.com/t-seeds.php>

Sprout People

Sprout People has lots of sprouting mixes for both people and birds. Their Lil' Bird Sprout Blend contains Sunflower (in shell), Wheat, Spelt (hulled), Triticale, Barley (hulless), Oats (hulless), Millet, Buckwheat (in hull), Brown Rice, Green, Crimson, Blue and Red Lentils, Adzuki Beans, Mung Beans, Fenugreek, Brown and Golden Flax, Alfalfa, Red Clover, Oriental Mustard, Daikon and China Rose Radish, Quinoa, Sesame, Amaranth and is my favorite for small and medium-sized birds.

<http://www.sproutpeople.com/birds.html>

Where to Purchase the Screens

I like using a plain, stainless steel screen with the outer lids that come with the Mason jars. You can buy just the screens from Down to Earth, or you can buy complete screens with lids from Sprout People (both described below).

My absolute favorite is the **Sprout Screen**, by Down to Earth. It's stainless steel, it fits wide-mouthed Mason jars, and it has a nice, fine mesh. You can buy these on the Internet from Amazon and other places. Prices range from \$2.25 at Mountain Rose Herbs to \$3.00 at other places.

<http://www.mountainroseherbs.com/tools/kitchen.php#to kt sprout s>



The Sprout People website, www.sproutpeople.com, also has stainless steel screen lids that fit wide-mouthed Mason jars, however, they do not sell the screens alone without the lids. The screens come in fine, medium, and coarse mesh sizes. I find that with birds, I use the fine mesh because the birds eat so many of the smaller seed sprouts.

Differences in Seed, Grain, and Legume Sprouts

You can germinate seeds, but you should sprout legumes. Grains can be either germinated or sprouted. Some easy sprouts to start with are sunflower seeds (shelled or unshelled), mung beans, lentils, and wheat berries.

Avoid large beans. Use instead, mung, garbanzo, and adzuki beans and be sure that they are sprouted and not just germinated.

CAUTION

Never feed sprouts that look or smell bad.