

GREEN FOOD IS VALUABLE

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The feeding of green food plays an important part in a bird's diet. The usual hard seeds given to birds do not supply them with 811 the essentials to ensure a long and healthy life.

Most vitamins and minerals are obtained from green food and very few are available in hard seed, especially if it is old, as the vitamins deteriorate rapidly with age.

I have heard fanciers say they never give their birds green food as it causes trouble and the birds die. If birds do not get a regular supply of green food and suddenly they are given a large quantity, there is little doubt that they will develop some trouble. On the other hand, if they receive a regular supply no ill effects will be caused if a large quantity is given when the supply is plentiful.

It is always advisable to wash, green food in a bucket of water in case it has been contaminated by cats or dogs.

The best green food is that which is growing in full sunlight, Dark green leaves are preferable to pale or light green.

It is a well known fact that to get maximum breeding results you first have to build up the condition of the bird. There is no better way to build up condition than by supplying an ample quantity of green food.

In America a study of the buds and shoots of certain trees in spring has shown an increase in the B vitamins during the growth of buds and shoots. This probably explains the great fondness wild bird's show for young buds and shoots.

Carotene, pro-vitamin A, also occurs in young shoots and buds, in fact in anything that turns green, red or yellow among natural foods. Yellow foods like carrot, nasturtium flowers, etc, are not only valuable for dyeing the plumage yellow or reddish, but also for enriching the blood with vitamin A.

In the wild birds consume a large amount of berries in the autumn. This helps considerably during the moult. Other green foods which assist during the moult, as well as acting as a tonic are plantains, knotgrass, shepherd's purse, chickweed,

docks, and dandelion.

Here is a general list of some plants suitable to use as green food: Panic veldt grass, Long-flowered veldt grass, Sorghums, Stinging nettles, Crowsfoot, Cocksfoot, Summer couch, Paspalum, Annual meadow grass, Dock, Chickweed, Dandelion, Rye grass, Knotgrass, Greater and Ribwort plantains, Milk thistle, Groundsel, Lettuce and Cabbage leaves, Watercress, Prairie grass, Silver beet, and Spinach.

Of the flower seeds, Calendulas, Marigolds, Cosmos, and Nasturtiums are good, Blackberry, Privet, Hawthorn and Crataegus are ideal berries.

Young lettuce and cabbage leaves contain all vitamins, Lettuce is especially rich in vitamin E. Little is known about vitamin E, except that a deficiency of this vitamin can lead to infertility.

A few plants are supposed to be poisonous, but usually the bird's instinct will warn it. It is only when the bird has been starved of green food and a supply is given with a poisonous piece included that there is any chance of trouble.

It is said that darnel is the most common poisonous weed and it is similar to rye grass, the difference being that the seed is slightly larger than rye grass and each seed has a long hair attached. Darnel is an annual and rye grass is a perennial.

Below is a summary, by the experts, of some green foods:

Chickweed -- May be used at any stage of its life with good results. At the mature stage it is a favourite with most hens for their young. The green leaves and shoots are rich in vital chemical elements which are essential to good health and fitness. These elements also have a good effect on the bloodstream.

Dandelion -- Stands alone among the weeds for good value, there is hardly a finer tonic among all the weeds. It contains a high percentage of easily absorbable mineral salts and it is generally agreed to be the best blood purifier in nature's medicine chest.

Dock Seed -- Has a good effect on the plumage. It contains a good percentage of wholesome oily matter which makes it valuable as a winter food for keeping the body temperature constant and dispelling chills. The oil also serves as a fine internal lubricant and has not been accused of causing undue fatness. In fact the effect seems to be the reverse. The bowels are kept in such a healthy condition that there is no morbid accumulation of fat. For this reason dock seed has often been used as a very effective corrective agent where a tendency to fatness has been noticed.

Annual Meadow Grass -- Most sought after grass by all seed-eating birds, very rich in vitamins.

Rye Grass -- Seeds are highly nourishing and one of the most valuable. One might almost call them a small variety of corn.

Shepherd's Purse -- It has the advantage that you can use it with safety in all stages of its growth; it is even safe with young birds. It is a medicine as well as a food, and unlike many medicines it is thoroughly enjoyed. The best stage to gather this plant is when the little seed pods are fully formed.

Groundsel -- The chemical constituents of groundsel have long been known to stimulate the liver and kidney functions and it is probably for this reason that its use as a green food is often followed by a marked improvement in many cases of internal disorders.

Knotgrass -- Its greatest claim to fame lies in its remarkable healing effect on the kidneys. It is an herb that is widely used in sanitariums on the Continent, especially in Germany, where most extraordinary cures are recorded. It is related to the docks.

Lettuce -- Seed used with marked success for reducing fatness. It has rather a purgative action and produces a cooling effect on the blood. It has also been recommended for wheeziness and has a beneficial effect on various voice troubles, possibly because of its tonic action on the system as a whole. The plant is rich in minerals of a nutritional and medicinal nature and of its total mineral make up 37% is potash, 7% Soda, 14% lime and 6% is magnesia. There are also considerable amounts of iron and phosphorus. The cabbage lettuce in particular is rich in iron and therefore great value in maintaining healthy blood condition.

Plantain -- Both the greater and the ribwort are highly nourishing as foods, and a valuable medicine -- they have marked beneficial effects on the breathing organs in asthma cases. Best of the wild foods for ensuring a healthy plumage after the moult. A course of plantain and rape seed is a favourite remedy for difficult breathing, wheeziness and asthmatic tendencies and many cases are recorded where cures have been effected by this means alone.

Watercress -- Probably the most highly medicinal of all our wild green foods. Never use when grown in tainted water -- must be pure fresh water streams. It contains those vital elements which are so often lacking in dried or preserved foods. It often produces an astonishing tonic effect.

Of the berries, blackberry contains a medicinal principle with a marked astringent action, and on this account probably has an excellent tonic effect on birds' stomachs. Also of great value when ripe as a colour food and has none of the unpleasant after effects sometimes associated with artificial products used for this purpose.

Privet -- Near relative of the famous olive of southern Europe. Doubtful if there is any other colouring agent which works as safely. Birds show a marked improvement in both health and appearance.

Some fanciers mix cod liver oil or Vetemul with seed. Containing vitamin A and D3, they are of great value as they enable the bird to absorb about 30% more calcium and phosphorus from its diet. This is very important, especially for breeding birds, and also for growing birds, as well as in the formation of egg shells.

If birds get green food daily in sufficient quantity they will get enough vitamin A and D3 to make the vitamin oils unnecessary, unless they are expected to lay heavily, like heavy-laying fowls, for whom green food does not contain enough of these vitamins.

Birds require vitamins and minerals in proper proportion, not just fish oils. This is the disadvantage of adding any good things -- you don't add all the other to restore proper balance. Green food is more balanced all round, and is a complete supplement with vitamins and minerals, as well as all the other things essential to success.

Feeding fish oils in place of green food can give an excess of vitamins A and D3 as well as a deficiency in other breeding essentials such as trace minerals and vitamin B complex. An excess of one thing over another makes the birds' instincts top-heavy or lop-sided -- for instance, they may lay better and rear poorly. The throwing out of youngsters, failure to feed, or failure to sit could be the results of not supplying vitamins and minerals in proper balanced proportions.

Seeding grasses do not come under the heading of green food because the seeds of such grasses may be in a half-ripe milky stage. Even so they are excellent and make a partial substitute for green food like lettuce, thistle, dandelion, chickweed, etc. Seeding grasses form a class of their own, between green food and seed mixture. If seeding grasses are given, green food can be reduced considerably. But when the seeding grass is still in the very young stage -- before the seeds are milky, that is, when the juice squeezed out of them is still greenish -- they come under the heading of true green food. It is easy to classify seeding grasses this way by pressing the seed heads on a hard surface with your thumbnail and examining the juice which comes out.