

Introduction to breeding

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Consider canaries if you want to raise pets in your own home. Unlike dogs and cats, there is no surplus of unwanted cage birds. If you decide to breed canaries, my best advice is to read a book about breeding them because there is more you should know than can be covered in canaviary website. However, here are some basics.

Obviously, you need to start with a male and a female. This is not always simple because it is difficult to determine the sex of canaries by appearance. Most males sing and most females don't, but there are exceptions both ways. The only way to be 100% sure is to buy older birds from a breeder who has already bred them once. Ask for a "proven" hen who was a good mother and you will avoid disappointment.

Canaries are only fertile when the length of the day is increasing to about 12 hours. This naturally happens in the spring. The birds must also have adequate nutrition which should include animal protein such as hard-boiled eggs. It is crucial to provide a cuttlebone or similar source of calcium for the hen to eat.

Canaries are territorial and each pair needs its own cage. If the hen fights with the male, she is not ready and they should be separated. For convenience, many breeders use a double cage with a removable wire partition. When you observe them "kissing" through the bars, you can remove the partition and see if they are compatible.

When the hen is ready to lay, she will want to build a nest. Buy an open (uncovered) 4" nest cup from a pet shop and hang it in a top corner of the cage. Provide nesting material for her to line the nest with. Pet shops sell commercial material for canary nests, or you can shred burlap or even toilet paper.

The hen lays one egg a day until 4 or 5 are laid. To ensure that all the eggs in a clutch hatch together, take the eggs away as they are laid, store them in little numbered bins, and put a dummy egg in the nest to fool the bird. She will lay egg early in the morning. Wait until she hops off the nest to get some food before you take the nest to switch the egg. Use plastic spoon to remove it. When the hen has finished laying (her last egg will be bright blue), put all the real eggs back in the nest. Always set (return eggs to) the hen with her eggs in the early morning. Then she sits on them for 2 weeks and rarely leaves the nest. Hatching in the morning allows the chicks to receive maximum possible amount of the food before the light goes out. When the chicks hatch, you must provide food rich in egg protein for the parents to feed them. Greens such as broccoli and sprouts are also very important.

The chicks leave the nest about 18 days after hatching. The parents will feed them for another week or so. Then the hen will want to start a new family and may attack the old one. A double cage becomes useful again because you can separate the chicks from the parents. The father can feed them through the bars while the hen lays another clutch.

By the time they are 4 weeks old, the chicks must learn to eat on their own. Provide them with the same egg food the parents fed them. Also prepare softened seed by soaking it for 48 hours. Rinse the soaked seed daily. Start an assembly line so that every day you will have seed that has been soaked for 2 days. Do not give them the normal dry canary seed mix until they are at least 6 weeks old.

Limit a pair to raising two families a year, or the parents will become exhausted. Move the hen away from the male to another cage with no nest and she should stop laying. The young birds will get along with each other until they are mature the following winter.

To learn more about breeding canaries, join a cage-bird club. Asking other breeders what to do is the best way to become a successful breeder yourself!