

The Green Day Diet

The Green Day Diet was formulated at Gulf Coast Finches in Beaumont, Texas. It has been used for a few years with success. Even though it seems a bit work-intensive, the results are worth it! Once you have prepared it a few times, you will find it not that difficult to make.

It is served every morning at lights on every day of the year. There is a two-fold reason for this. When the finches wake, they are hungry and it is better to be eating a nutritious morning meal than stuffing their crops with seed. Secondly, new hatchlings must be fed and receiving the nutritious soft foods supplies everything needed for fast-growing bodies. It insures that they will develop successfully. They will also wean faster, which is a consideration when the parents have gone back to the nest to start a second clutch.

Maximum digestive efficiency is reached with vegetables and eggs—less crop time before being digested. Seed spends 75% of its time in the crop, as it has to be broken down first by enzymes and saliva. Pelletized and other dried foods also slow down the digestive process, as finches must take on additional water and wait for the dried foods to soften. The better the digestive efficiency, the more net energy is attained, and that can translate into triggering egg production.

Although the diet was first developed as a breeding diet, it soon made sense to feed it year 'round. With the many species being raised here, breeding times differed throughout the year and when the breeding cycles came up, the birds needed to be in top condition. By eliminating what has sometimes been referred to as an austerity diet, birds can successfully breed when they should without fear of them not being nutritionally prepared. Well-fed birds are also less susceptible to becoming sick.

The many people using the diet report their birds are healthier, breed easier and for those raising show birds, they are placing their finches on the top bench. You will notice better coloration of feathers after the first molt on this diet. It is a result of carotene in the diet. Also, form improves and succeeding generations show many characteristics of being “at optimum.”

The Green Day Diet is vegetable- and egg-based, but is NOT a mash. All of my birds are cage-bred or flight-bred indoors. The food is served on a 5” dia. plate with 4 piles on it. One is the Cole Slaw mix, one is broccoli, one is the dark leafy green of the day, and the largest pile (about 35%) is the fresh egg mix. Finches can discern which foods they need and demonstrate that they are self-regulators. It is not necessary to mix all together “to get them to eat what they should.” Instead, by not making it a mash, the finches can clearly identify which foods they need rapidly, as well as making their food plate interesting and inviting. This is especially critical for parents feeding newborn, as the diet they feed their hatchlings is usually all egg food.

Even though I place the same amount of food on the birds' plates each day, some days, some of the plates are cleaned off, and other days there may be leftovers. They have eaten

what they need. Birds also must see there is an ample supply of food before they decide to raise a family, so I always try to make sure there is more than enough served.

Here is the veggie breakdown:

One vegetable mix that is given daily is cabbage and carrot, which is low in iron and oxalates, but has a good level of carotene and several vitamins. Carotene not only provides color to feathers, but stimulates the ovaries of hens for egg production. I used to buy a pre-pack Cole Slaw mix with the two already shredded. Then I cut them down to beak-size portions. Due to the larger amount of food I am now preparing, I have since switched to buying the cabbage and carrots separately and use a food processor for the carrots, but still prefer a chef's knife for the cabbage.

Broccoli is nature's most abundantly nutritious vegetable and is served every day. It is relatively low in iron, but packs Vitamins A, C and K. Select tight heads with no flowers open. Once flowers open, the incidence of mold accelerates fast. I cut at least an inch below the florets, as it is in the stem where potassium resides. So when picking out broccoli, turn it upside down and look for the greenest stems. When I finish cutting them up and processing them, the results resembles a pile of small green crumbles.

Other vegetables used on a rotating basis are collard, mustard and turnip greens. These greens are packed with vitamins and minerals, yet don't exhibit any high toxicity levels. I usually wash the leaves, pinch off the stems or "de-vein" the larger leaves with thicker stalks, then bundle them up and start slicing. I keep slicing and dicing until they are beak-size. The collards have the highest amount of bioavailable (soluble) calcium of all of the vegetables used, so collards appear on the finches' plates at least 4 times a week.

Since parsley and spinach are high in iron content, I use them only once a week and they usually are mixed in with one of the regular greens. Iron and calcium are the two main building blocks of growing hatchlings, but too much iron prevents the calcium from being absorbed and over time can cause oxalates to form in the kidneys.

I don't use cucumbers or iceberg lettuce, as they do not contain nutrients of any appreciable value. Think of them as unique vessels for holding water.

Two important things to remember: all of the food should be processed or cut down to BEAK SIZE portions. A finch will not wrestle with a whole floret of broccoli. It is also key to weaning fledglings faster.

Secondly, do not leave out or substitute parts of the diet. It has been formulated to be nutritionally balanced. It has also been designed so vitamins and minerals do not reach toxic levels.

Here is the fresh egg recipe:

In a 3 qt. sauce pan, I boil 18-20 eggs for 15 minutes, remove from heat and drain. After about 10 minutes, I use a regular potato masher and go at them, cracking them open. From there, they go to the KitchenAid mixer shell and all, using the paddle attachment. They are mixed until there are no lumps of egg present and the shell pieces are no larger than ¼” across. The paddle collects much of the membrane from the eggs and when I am finished, I remove the paddle and peel off the membrane and dispose of it.

(Tip #1: It’s a lot easier breaking the shells when the eggs are still hot. Tip #2: If the yolks are not firm, you need to add a little cooking time. If sulfur has started accumulating around the yolks (that greenish look), then you have boiled the eggs a little too long, so back off your cooking time. They are still usable, however.)

I replace the cleaned off paddle and sprinkle the powdered contents of two 400 mg capsules of Horsetail Shavegrass on the egg. This herbal product can be found in health food stores. It delivers the highest amount of bioavailable silica, which is used to form collagen, the fibrous material that attaches bones to muscles. Mix in the powder for about two minutes.

Next, add 1 teaspoon of Wheat Germ Oil (nature’s most abundant source of Vitamin E) for every 4 eggs and 1 teaspoon of Cod Liver Oil (nature’s most abundant source of Vitamin D3) for every 4 eggs. Mix these oils in well. Finally, I add about a cup and a half of Corn Meal (fortified with niacin) and mix until the egg mix is crumbly. The finished product may still appear to be more sticky than crumbly, but if the mix sits 15-30 minutes, you will see the consistency change as the corn meal absorbs moisture. There you go. Done.

Oil-soluble vitamins deteriorate faster than those in the rest of the food and can lose their potency. If you are making a batch larger than what you need, refrigerate the rest. And here’s the neat thing about using both the Wheat Germ and Cod Liver Oils. Vitamin D3 is very transitory in the body and can only be pulled from the stream as it goes by. Excess is thrown off. The molecules of Vitamin E in the Wheat Germ attach to the Vitamin D3 and hold it in reserve in the body for later use. Can scientific serendipity get much better than this?

Notation: For those of you who have been using this diet, an amendment was made in November 2009. Horsetail Shavegrass was added to the egg food.

FAQs (in advance of them being asked)

1. Why do you leave the shells in with the eggs? I hate peeling eggs, but why throw away one of the best sources of calcium? My birds eat them, and if there are a few pieces too big for consumption, they leave them on the plate.
2. Have your finches ever experienced egg binding? Not a one. Even though the vegetables are the most efficient in satisfying calcium needs, egg shell, cuttlebone and oyster shell make a good backup. Sufficient D3 moves calcium in the bloodstream to where it is needed, such as in egg production, and reduces the risk of binding.

3. This Vitamin D3--you're saying that if they get enough in their diet, they don't need light to produce it? Theoretically, they could survive. But practicality dictates they have light to set their biological clocks—a day length—so it will trigger mating. Plus the fact they need to be able to see to find their food, water and the bathroom. I'm sure they'd make it, though, if all they had was their Hello Kitty nightlight.
4. Can the finches overdose on Vitamin D3? No. The known cases of D3 overdose are outside of the bird world and are attributed to manufacturing accidents. When the body has used all of the D3 it needs, the rest of the available D3 degrades into the system and heads toward the Exit sign.
5. Do eggs contain protein? Yes, over half of it is in the white portion, so make sure your kids eat the whites as well as the yolks.
6. Is it really that important to feed your finches eggs? Egg contains everything a bird needs to live on.
7. Why fresh eggs and not a dried egg mix that may contain starches and sugars? My birds love the fresh egg mix I prepare and it quickly goes into the digestive tract for almost immediate use. My birds are not fed any manufactured mixes for the same reason. Dry mixes must be softened up in the crop with an additional intake of water and it greatly slows down the time it is in the crop. This is not digestive efficiency. I also know exactly what they are eating, that it is fresh, and that it is totally healthy for them. Fresh egg food becomes more critical when feeding hatchlings so they expend less energy on digestion and more on growing.
8. What do you do with leftovers? I cook as closely to possible for one day's feeding, but if there is any left over, I will refrigerate it and save it for one day only, just in case I run short. If not, I make sure it gets used the next day.
9. How long do you leave the egg food in the cage? Until the next morning when they get a fresh plate. Wait a minute! That goes against what you've heard. Believe me, most of the egg food is eaten in the early hours of the day. If not, it's left on the plates. The birds know when to stop eating it. It's also one of the reasons there is no fruit in this diet, as the natural sucrose produces mold fast and can contaminate the plate. I've also written in other articles about the importance of a good air circulation system to keep pathogens at bay. But they do have to see there's enough food on a plate where there will be enough to raise and feed a family. So most of them do get oversized portions each day and food that is left over on the plate indicates to me that I have also fed their instinct to breed successfully. "Successfully" includes a higher ratio of hens that are born. This answer is getting too long and needs its own space at another time.
10. What is your operation's mortality rate since you seem to be tempting fate here? You're still not convinced. Excluding birds I have brought in to breed--in other words, birds that have been hatched and raised here: Zero.
11. So what about the birds you bring in? Still an extremely low mortality rate—not enough to start up my Finch Keychain business. I have bought from various sources in the past and have just about eliminated this problem by using one broker I trust. Yet, there are a bird or two that look healthy upon arrival and symptoms of being sick don't show up for awhile. It is my perception that quarantine stations load up the wild caught birds with antibiotics (tetracycline for 5 weeks) that mask but don't cure some health issues. They pass through a bird purveyor's hands looking healthy and arrive in

fine shape as the antibiotics are still masking. Secondly, once you have gone through a quarantine procedure and introduce new birds to your breeding areas, they are susceptible to pathogens that are present which they previously have not been exposed to. Read my article, Quarantine 2.0, for a more detailed explanation.

12. Are any of your finches obese? No. The vegetables are low-cal and the birds utilize the energy from the eggs. It appears they can eat an endless supply of this diet.
13. Do you also provide seed for your finches? Yes, they always have seed available. Seed is a good source of phosphorous, but it should never exceed 35% of a finch's diet. Water is also provided, fresh daily.

OK, that's about it for the food. If you colony breed, you may want to give a 2nd serving later in the day. Also, cages with new hatchlings and fledglings require more food, and they may need to get their food refreshed.

There are several other articles that are companion pieces to this subject. They appear from time-to-time on several Yahoo finch groups and websites. If you have any questions, you may email me at gulfcoastfinches@yahoo.com

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