

## PINE CONES

Pine cones make excellent toys for birds and are safe for chinchillas, rabbits, guinea pigs and other rodents. The seeds inside the pine cones are safe for birds and make a great reward for all the work they must put in to get to them!

Some safety tips:

- Do not pick up pine cones that they are old, damp, moldy or are growing moss. Ideally one should collect pine cones as soon as possible after they have fallen to the ground and before they have become wet from rain. If they have been lying there for a long time, you may not be able to detect mould, but it may still be there and can be dangerous.
- Pine cones are also a favorite hiding spot for little beasts such as spiders and earwigs so do not give them to your pet directly.
- Be sure you do not pick up pine cones from alongside roads or in very busy areas. The trees they fall from and the soil they grow in have been exposed to chemicals and possibly even poisons for long periods of time. Ideally collect from trees away from roads, in undeveloped areas, and where the use of pesticides is unlikely.
- It is almost impossible to "sterilize" pine cones, and soaking them in disinfectants makes them taste bad to the pets, but heating in an oven will kill moulds and little critters and make them safe for the birds to chew on. Heating the pine cones in an oven for about 20 minutes at 120 degrees Celcius, then turn off the oven. Leave the pine cones in the oven for a further 2 hours or so to dry out. (Do not go much higher than 120 degrees or the pine cones may catch fire and burn making them unsafe)

