Native to Australia, the Zebra Finch is one of the most commonly held cage birds among exotic finches because it is one of the easiest birds to house and feed and is ideal for the beginning bird keeper. Once you have decided to keep Zebra Finches, you need to select perfect specimens. Choose birds from a reliable breeder and observe if your birds are alert, lively, sleek feathered and plump.

Whether you choose one Zebra Finch, or a pair, you will want to determine the sex of your birds. Zebra Finches are sexually dimorphic; that is, males and females look differently from one another in all the color varieties except the white mutation. Even whites can usually be sexed by the male's redder beak.

Male zebras are easily distinguished from females by their distinctive orange-red ear spots, while the female's head is plain gray. Both male and female are silver gray with black and white crossbarring on the tail, and a few shelves for food storage and perches.

Zebra Finches many mutations will occur — black and white mixtures, even gray or fawn colors.

Zebra Finches will breed inside the house in flight cages that are at least three feet long. They like to build their nests in wooden finch boxes or rattan baskets and need soft, dry grass, moss and bits of yarn or string for nest building. They find lint from the clothes dryer very acceptable nesting material. Your cages should not have wire flooring because finches like to eat off the floor. Do not place cages in drafts or direct sunshine.

If you decide on an outside aviary, you may want to build your own. Modular welded wire with a square steel post framework can be used for your bird house. These modular units can be easily and quickly constructed.

You may want to consider building your bird house using plywood and wire. We have two such avaries in our back patio, each is four feet square by eight feet high. They are constructed of four by eight sheets of quarter-inch plywood for sides and sloping roof and half-inch plywood for the floor. Before construction began, all wooden materials were given two coats of white paint.

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