Catching
The best way I have found to catch pigeons is by hand. A large fish net with a long handle can make you a little more productive, but it is not necessary. You will want to do this at night when the pigeons are roosting. I like to wear the "dot" gloves (white cotton with black vinyl dots on the palm and fingers) because I can get a more secure grip on the birds. I also wear a good dust mask to avoid breathing all the dust that will get stirred up. I carry a flashlight in my left hand, along with a wire fish basket with a spring-loaded lid. Shine the light into the pigeon's eyes, walk up to it, grab it, and put it in the fish basket. That's all there is to it.

The best place to find pigeons is in barns. Get permission from the farmer, and be sure to thoroughly scout out the barn during daylight to check for any hazards such as loose floorboards or openings in the floor, farming equipment, etc. I carry a cell phone on me when I go out, just in case, say, I fall through a floor or something, and need help.

Feeding
About the best diet I have found is plain cracked corn. Feed the birds as much as they will eat in 10 minutes, twice a day. The birds will also need grit (small stones) for their crop. These stones grind the food so the bird can digest it.

Watering
Plenty of clean water should be available for drinking at all times. You may also want to provide a shallow container for them to take a bath in once a week or so. Both food and water containers should have a way to keep the birds from fouling in them. You may have to fabricate or buy a cone shaped "roof" to keep them from perching on top and defecating in their food and water.

Shelter and Protection
Keep your birds protected from the elements; wind, rain, sun. It is best to use 1/2" square wire mesh (called "hardware cloth") for your coop. This is a small and strong enough mesh to keep out predators such as cats, rats, coons, hawks, etc.

Pests and diseases
You may see small light-colored bugs on your pigeon's feathers. These are most likely "feather lice" and are easily eliminated with Ectiban-D powder. Ectiban-D is available at some grain elevators. Put some in an old sock and dust the pigeon(s) thoroughly. Pigeon droppings are a source of bacteria that can cause health problems in humans if inhaled repeatedly. Wear a dust mask when catching birds or when cleaning their coop. Wash your hands with soap and water after handling pigeons.

Sources for supplies:
You can purchase the above supplies at most feed stores, farm supply outlets, and grain elevators. A good mail order source is Foy's Pigeon Supplies (http://www.foyspigeonsupplies.com/). Lion Country Supply (www.lcsupply.com) also has a good selection of basic stuff.

Using a Pigeon for Retriever Training
Pigeons can be very useful in training a retriever. Depending on the dog, they can be used over and over, without harm to the bird. Just as humane treatment of your dog should be important to you, so humane treatment of your training pigeons should be important as well. Rotate the birds on and off "active duty" status frequently to reduce wear and tear.
Wing-Clipping Pigeons
Unless they have been hatched on your property, you don't want your pigeons to be able to fly, since they will most likely not return. We can easily (but only temporarily) prevent them from flying by removing the flight feathers on one or both wings. This is accomplished by holding the bird and one wing with one hand, and pulling the primary (wing tip) feathers with the other hand. These feathers will grow back, so you will have to periodically repeat this procedure. You will have to experiment with how many feathers to remove to adjust their flight distance to the available training area.

For the birds protection, I also suggest that you temporarily (only when training) hobble its legs by tying them together. I use a bread bag twist-tie for this. Don't tie it so tight so as to cut off circulation to the feet, and remove it as soon as the training session is over. Bend the ends of the wire in so they don't poke your dogs tender gums. How does hobbling protect the bird? Even though it can't fly, a bird on its feet can put up a good struggle for your dog, especially if your dog is a pup. The dog can inadvertently injure the bird in trying to capture it. Easier capture = less chance of injury for the bird.

"Planting" a live bird
Sometimes we want the dog to locate a bird hidden in cover, rather than seeing you throw it. It will be easier to "plant" the pigeon if you put it to sleep first. There are several ways to instantly put a bird to sleep. Ones way is as follows.

1. Gently tuck the bird’s head under one wing then hold the wing down gently so the head doesn't come out.
2. Twirl the bird in a circle 6-8 times.
3. Now, place the pigeon on the ground, with the wing that has its head under it on the ground first.

The bird should stay asleep for several minutes, or until disturbed. Of course, you don't want your dog to see you do this.

Letting your flyers out
I said above that unless your pigeons have been born on your property, they will not return if allowed to fly. This is not completely true. All pigeons have the homing instinct, but it is stronger in some than in others. This is how homing pigeons have been developed; by breeding those birds with the strongest homing instinct, lines of birds have been developed that show very strong homing capability.

Once your birds have been on your property for a month or two, you can try letting some of them go free. Be sure you keep some "seed" birds (wing clips work well) in your coop, in full view of the "flyers". For their first free flight, do it in the evening, about 1/2-hour before sunset. They are less likely to go far with darkness approaching. Also, the seed birds will help bring them back. Count on losing a few birds; those with the strongest homing instinct will probably return to where they were born, those with the weakest instinct will hang around and return to roost each night in your coop; make a way for them to get in, then close them up at night to keep out predators.

May all your training be enjoyable and productive.

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