

Better Safe Than Sorry – a Guide to “Dangerous” Plants

No list of plants “safe” or “dangerous” to birds and all pets can be complete or completely accurate. A lot of controversy surrounds the designation of plants “safe” or “hazardous” to birds and other pets. Plants considered poisonous are on the list based on medical experiences from human, livestock, poultry or isolated pet incidents. Once a plant has been implicated in a poisoning, no matter what the circumstance, it remains so in the medical literature. Only avocado toxicity has been documented in birds in a controlled study. For most, we really don’t know whether plants listed are really poisonous in all cases including how much and what part of the plant was ingested or touched. It is best not to risk allowing any pet to get near a listed “poisonous plant”. “Better safe than sorry” is a good caution: replace any of your potentially “dangerous” plants with some of the many varieties of “safe” alternatives.

Whether a plant is safe, hazardous, or poisonous depends on a number of things including the species, habits, tastes, as well as the portion of the plant ingested and growth conditions. Effects will vary according to the animal species, type of digestive system, past history of chewing on plants, body weight, stomach contents (or lack), hydration, pre-existing health conditions, age, boredom and whether ingestion is normal activity, of dietary necessity or abnormal due to stress-induced appetite or nutritional changes. Many poisonous plants are foul tasting and under normal circumstances an animal will not eat them unless forced to due to confinement, starvation, or lack of proper nutrients in the diet. Plants can vary in toxicity and then affect the animal. The plants listed here are designated by common name as well as Latin name, but discrepancies in naming are common. You may have to do some research with your local nurseryman to correctly identify vegetation on your property or in your home. The amount and portion of the plant eaten, as well as the time period over which it was eaten may influence the digestion and absorption of toxic components into the animal’s system. The toxic component of the plant may vary according to the plant’s own water content.

Before offering any bark, branches or leaves from “safe” trees, scrub with a nontoxic disinfectant (such as dilute bleach), rinse and dry well.

Bromegrasses, burdocks, barleys, blackberries, boysenberries, raspberries, cacti, cocklebur, sandbur, foxtail, goathead, needlesgrass, pyracantha, rose and triple awns present mechanical hazards from the awns, spines or thorns which may directly puncture skin or mouth. If punctured and a piece of the plant remains in the animal, infection and abscess may result. Nettles have irritating hairs, and some cacti and members of the Euphorbia family produce irritating saps or latex.

Special Problem Plant Groups

Though not necessarily toxic, some plant groups present other hazards. Trees with rough bark primarily on their trunks often have new branches with smooth bark. That part of the following trees can be used. The rough bark cannot be adequately disinfected. Trees with safe “smooth” branches include big leaf maple, vine maple, sugar maple and firs. Pines, western hemlock, cedars, junipers and spruces are not recommended because some contain potentially toxic oils, saps or tars.

Alder is not recommended as the bark may have a laxative effect. Apple, apricot, peach, nectarine, plume and prune tree branches are safe, but the pits and seeds are toxic. The fruits themselves are safe, nutritious and enjoyed by many animals. Remove pits and seeds before feeding them to your pet. Avocado or its pit should never be offered to birds.

Inclusion or omission from either of these lists does not guarantee the safety or toxicity of a plant. The information is gleaned from the literature. It is recommended that you investigate the properties of every plant you use around you pet(s) If you cannot identify the plant and ascertain its safety, do not use it.

“Dangerous Plants”

These are considered potentially toxic to pets. All or part of the listed plant may be deemed hazardous. Items starred (*) have been used in aviearies without reported problems and may be considered of questionable hazard to birds.

Common Name	Latin Name	Symptoms**
Autumn crocus/Meadow saffron	<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	GI
Avocado	<i>Persea Americana, esp. var. Fuerte, Nabal</i>	GI
Azalea	<i>Azalea sp., Rhododendron sp.</i>	GI
Baneberry	<i>Actaea sp.</i>	GI
Beans:		
Castor	<i>Ricinus communis</i>	GI
Horse, Fava, Broad, Java	<i>Vicia faba</i>	BL
Glory, Scarlet Runner	<i>Phaseolus lunatus</i>	CY
Mescal	<i>Sophora sp.</i>	CNS
Rosary peas, Ind. Licorice	<i>Abus precatorius</i>	GI
Bird of Paradise, Poinciana	<i>Casealpiria sp., Strelitzia, Poinciana sp.</i>	GI
Bleeding Heart or Dutchman’s Breeches	<i>Dicentra spectabilis</i>	CNS
Bloodroot	<i>Sanguinaria canadensis</i>	GI
Boxwood	<i>Buxus sp.</i>	GI
Bracken fern	<i>Psteridium aquilirnum</i>	BL
Buckthorn	<i>Rhamnus sp.</i>	GI
Bulb Flowers		
Amaryllis	<i>Amaryllis sp.</i>	GI
Daffodil, Narcissus	<i>Narcissus sp.</i>	GI
Hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i>	GI
Iris	<i>Iris sp.</i>	GI
Caladium	<i>Caladium hybrids</i>	IR
Calla Lily	<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>	IR
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia sp.</i>	CNS

Chalis or Trumpet Vine	<i>Solandra sp.</i>	GI
Cherry tree, bark, pits	<i>Prunus sp.</i>	CNS
Chinaberry Tree	<i>Melia sp.</i>	CNS
Christmas Candle or Rose	<i>Helleborus niger</i>	GI
Clematis or Virginia Bower	<i>Clematis sp.</i>	CNS
Coral Plant	<i>Jatropha multifida</i>	GI
Cowslip, Marsh Marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	CNS
Daphne	<i>Daphne sp.</i>	GI
Death Camas	<i>Zigaderius venenosus</i>	CNS
Dieffenbachia, Dumb Cane	<i>Dieffenbachia segume, picta</i>	IR
Elderberry	<i>Sam bucus</i>	CNS
Elephants Ear, Taro (not root)	<i>Colocasia antiquorum, esculenta</i>	IR
Eucalyptus Tree* (not dyed, treated)	<i>Eucalyptus sp.</i>	CY
Euonymus or Spindle Tree	<i>Euonymus sp.</i>	GI
False Hellebore	<i>Veratrum sp.</i>	CV
Firethorn*, Pyracantha	<i>Pyracantha sp.</i>	IR
Four O'Clock	<i>Mirabilis jalapa</i>	GI
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	CV
Golden Chain	<i>Laburnum anagyroides</i>	CNS
Grass: Johnson, Sorghum, Sudan, Broomcorn	<i>Sorghum sp.</i>	CY
Ground Cherry	<i>Physalis</i>	GI
Hemlock		
Poison	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	CNS
Water	<i>Cicuta maculate</i>	CNS
Henbane	<i>Hysoscyamus niger</i>	CNS
Holly	<i>Ilex sp.</i>	GI
Honeysuckle*	<i>Lonicera sp.</i>	GI
Horsechestnut or Buckeye	<i>Aesculus sp.</i>	GI
Horsetail	<i>Equisiteum arvense</i>	CNS
Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>	CNS
Ivy*, English, varieties	<i>Hedera sp.</i>	GI
Jack-in-the-Pulpit or Ind. Turnip	<i>Arisaema sp.</i>	IR
Jasmine	<i>Cestrum sp.</i>	GI, CNS
Jimsonweek or Thornapple	<i>Datura sp.</i>	CNS
Kentucky Coffee Tree	<i>Gymocladus dioica</i>	CNS
Lantana	<i>Lantana camara</i>	CNS
Larkspur	<i>Delphinium sp.</i>	CV
Lily-of-the-Valley	<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	CV
Locusts		
Black	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	GI
Honey	<i>Gleditsia</i>	RE

Lords and Ladies or cuckoopint	<i>Arum sp.</i>	GI
Lupines or Bluebonnet	<i>Lupinus sp.</i>	CNS
Marijuana or Hemp	<i>Cannabis sativa</i>	CNS
Mayapple, Mandrake	<i>Podophyllum peltatum</i>	GA
Mistletoe	<i>Phoradendron sp.</i>	GI
Mock Orange	<i>Southern: Prunus caroliniana, Poncirus sp., Philadelphus sp.</i>	GI, CNS
Monkshood, Aconite	<i>Acoritum sp.</i>	CV
Moonseed	<i>Menispermum canadense</i>	CNS
Morning Glory	<i>Ipomeas p.</i>	CNS
Mushrooms – Amanita, others	<i>Amanita sp. Others</i>	GI, CNS
Nettles	<i>Urtica sp, Lasportea sp., Nidosculus sp.</i>	CNS, CV, IR
Nightshades: Deadly, Black, Garden, Woody, Bittersweet, Eggplant, Jerusalem Cherry, Potato shoots	<i>Solanum sp.</i>	GI, CNS
Oaks	<i>Quercus sp.</i>	GI
Oleander	<i>Nerium sp.</i>	CV
Oleander, Yellow	<i>Thevetia peruviana</i>	CV
Periwinkle	<i>Vinca rosea</i>	CNS
Philodendrons *: var Split Leaf, Swiss Cheese	<i>Philodendrons sp., Monstera deliciosa</i>	IR
Pigweed	<i>Amaranthus sp.</i>	BL
Poinsettia*	<i>Euphorbia pulcherrima</i>	IR
Poison Ivy	<i>Toxicodendron radicans, Rhus toxicodendron</i>	IR
Poison Oak:		
Western	<i>Toxicodendron diversilobum</i>	IR
Eastern	<i>T. quercifolium</i>	IR
Pokeweed or Inkberry	<i>Phytolacca americana</i>	GI
Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>	GI
Rain Tree	<i>Samonia samon</i>	GI
Ranunculus, Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus sp.</i>	CNS
Red Maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	GI
Rhubarb leaves	<i>Rheum rhaponticum</i>	UR
Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Laurels	<i>Rhodendron sp.</i>	GI
Sandbox Tree	<i>Hara crepitans</i>	GI
Skunk Cabbage	<i>Symplocarpus foetidus</i>	IR
Sorrel, Dock	<i>Rmex sp.</i>	CNS
Snowdrop	<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	GI

Spurges	<i>Euphorbia sp.</i>	GI, IR
Pencil Tree	<i>Euphorbia tirucalli</i>	GI, IR
Snow on the Mountain	<i>E.marginata</i>	GI, IR
Candelabra Tree	<i>E. lacteal</i>	GI, IR
Crown of Thorns	<i>E.milii</i>	GI, IR
Seet Pea, related peas	<i>Lathyrus odoratus, sp.</i>	CNS
Tansy Ragwort	<i>Senecio jacobei</i>	CNS
Tobacco, Tree Tobacco	<i>Nicotiana sp.</i>	CNS
Vetch	<i>Vicia</i>	CY
Virginia Creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolio</i>	GI
Wisteria	<i>Wisteria sp.</i>	GI
Yews	<i>Taxus sp, Podocarpus sp.</i>	CV, GA
Yellow Jasmine	<i>Gelsemium sp.</i>	CNS

Key:

GI = Gastrointestinal

CV = Cardiovascular

BL = Blood anomalies

CNS = Nervous system

IR = Irritant

UR = Urinary

CY = Signs associated with cyanide poisoning

RE = Reproductive

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