# Bird Safety: Poisonous and Safe Plants for Birds

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

There are a variety of plants which are poisonous to birds, but there are many safe plants, too. So if you are a dedicated house plant enthusiast, you can have your plants and birds, too.

How toxic a plant is for birds depends upon:

1. The plant itself
2. The amount ingested relative to the size of the bird
3. The species of the bird

For example, a cockatoo that nibbles a few bites of philodendron may experience a mild degree of toxicity, whereas, the same amount or less may be lethal for a canary.

Although there are significant differences among species as to reaction and sensitivity to various plants, most sources agree that those plants listed in Table 1 are toxic to any bird. This list may appear long but is by no means all-inclusive. There are many more toxic plants than safe plants, so stick to the "safe" list in Table 2 for plants you will keep in the bird's environment.

The most commonly observed sign of poisonous plant ingestion in birds is some form of gastric or intestinal upset – e.g., vomiting and/or diarrhea. The treatment for plant poisonings is generally symptomatic.

If you suspect your bird has ingested a toxic plant, call your veterinarian or the poison control center immediately. It may be a good idea to print this article and keep it in a handy place near the telephone so you do not have to go searching and waste time in a stressful situation.

ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center

- 1-888-4ANI-HELP or 1-888-426-4435 ($65.00 per case.) The charge is billed to caller's credit card only.

Although we are talking about plants here, it is worthy of mentioning that birds are acutely sensitive to fumes from solvents and Teflon. Do not use any Teflon coated cooking utensils, ironing board covers, or other items anywhere near a bird.

Table 1. Plants Toxic to Birds

| Toxic Plant | Toxic part(s) | Specific Toxin(s) | Symptoms |
|---|---|---|---|
| Avocado (Persea americana) | Pit, leaves, unripe fruit, stems | Unknown but related to cardiac toxicity | Weakness, inability to perch, labored breathing, feather fluffing |
| Black locust (Robina pseudoacacia) | Bark, leaves, seeds | Robitin, robin | Vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, depression, collapse |
| Blue-green algae (Microcystis aeruginosa) | All parts | Anatoxin A, mycrocystin | Inability to swim or fly, abnormal posture, frequent defecation, respiratory arrest |



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| Calla lily (Zantedeschia aethiopiea) | All parts | Oxalates | Oral irritation, difficulty swallowing, vomiting |
| Castor bean (Ricinus communis) | All parts | Ricin I & II, glycosidase | Vomiting, diarrhea (may be bloody) Note: similar symptoms may be seen with ingested prayer beans, rosary peas or Seminole beads used in beadwork and rattles) |
| Christmas cherry (Solanum pseudocapsicum) | All parts including tubers and unripened fruit | Solanine, atropine-like alkaloids, saponins | Vomiting, diarrhea, irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, dilated pupils, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Coffee beans, (Sesbania drumundii), Tea, Chocolate Beans (coffee) | Leaves (tea), all chocolates especially dark | Caffeine, theobromine, theophylline | Nervous system stimulation, increased rate of breathing and heart rate, seizures, diarrhea |
| Diffenbachia (Diffenbachia spp.) | All parts | Oxalates | Oral irritation, difficulty swallowing, vomiting |
| Eggplant (Solanum melongena) | Stem, leaves, sprouts (ripe fruits are OK) | Solanine, atropine-like alkaloids | Vomiting, diarrhea, irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, dilated pupils, no |



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| | | | dilated pupils, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Elephant's ear (Colocasia or Alocasia spp.) | All parts | Oxalates | Oral irritation, difficulty swallowing, vomiting |
| Ergot (Claviceps purpurea) | All parts | Ergopeptide alkaloids | Poor blood supply to extremities, hyperexcitability, seizures |
| Foxglove (Digitalis pupurea) | Entire plant, including water from pot or vase | Glycosides, digitalis | Vomiting, diarrhea, oral irritation, incoordination, irregular heart rate, collapse |
| Jerusalem cherry (Solanum pseudocapsicum) | All parts, including tubers, sprouts, and unripe berries | Solanine, atropine | Vomiting, diarrhea, irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Jimsonweed (Datura spp.) | All parts, especially seeds and leaves | Atropine, scopolamine, hyoscyamine | Irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, dilated pupils, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Lily of the valley (Convallaria majalis) | All parts | Cardiac glycosides: convallatoxin | Vomiting, diarrhea, oral irritation, incoordination, irregular heart rate, collapse |



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| Locoweed (Astragalus emoryanus) | Leaves | Swainsonine, alkaloids | Hyperexcitability, incoordination, vomiting, drowsiness |
| Milkweed (Asclepias spp.) | All parts and latex (milky juice) | Cardenoloids (cardiac glycosides) | Oral and/or facial blisters, irregular heart rate, incoordination, collapse |
| Mistletoe (Phoradendron villosum) | All parts, especially holly berries | Viscumin, viscotoxin | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, labored breathing, irregular heart rate, collapse |
| Nightshade (Solanum spp.) | All parts | Belladonna, atropine-like alkaloids | Vomiting, diarrhea, irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, dilated pupils, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Oak (Quercus spp.) | All parts | Tannins | Loss of appetite, diarrhea, increased thirst |
| Oleander (Nerium oleander) | All parts | Glycosides: oleadrum, neroside | Vomiting, diarrhea, oral irritation, incoordination, irregular heart rate, collapse |
| Philodendron (Philodendron scandens) | All parts, including roots | Oxalates | Oral irritation, difficulty swallowing, vomiting |
| Poinsettia (Euphorbia pulcheriama) | Leaves, stem, white sap | Phorbol esters | Vomiting, diarrhea, facial or eye irritation |



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| Pokeweed (Phytolacca americana) | Roots, leaves, berries | Saponin | Vomiting, tremors, collapse |
| Potatoes (Solanum tuberosum) | Stem, leaves, sprouts, green skins | Solanine, atropine-like alkaloids | Vomiting, diarrhea, irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, dilated pupils, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Rhododendron (Rhodedendron simsii), Rhododendron species (Azalea) | All parts | Andromedotoxin, grayanotoxin | Vomiting, weakness, collapse, seizure, stupor, coma |
| Tobacco (Nicotiana spp.) | All parts | Nicotine | Vomiting, diarrhea, hyperexcitability, seizures, muscle twitching, coughing, eye irritation |
| Tomatoes (Solanum lycopersicum) | Stem, leaves, sprouts (ripe fruits are OK) | Solanine, atropine-like alkaloids | Vomiting, diarrhea, irregular or rapid heart rate, difficulty swallowing, labored breathng, dilated pupils, no urine production, paralysis, seizures |
| Virginia creeper (Parthenocissus quinquefolio) | Berries, leaves | Oxalic acid | Vomiting, diarrhea (possibly bloody), drowsiness, stupor, renal failure |



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| Yew (Taxus media) | Wood, bark, seeds, leaves | Alkaloids (taxines) | Muscle tremors, difficulty breathing, collapse, sudden death |

Table 2. Plants Safe for Birds

| **Indoor/House Plants** | **Outdoor Plants** |
|---|---|
| African violet | American bittersweet |
| Aloe | Autumn olive |
| Areca palm | Bamboo |
| Australian laurel | Barberry |
| Bamboo palm | Bayberry |
| Begonias | American or European Beech |
| Bird's nest fern | Bladdernut |
| Boston fern | Blueberry |
| Bottle brush fern | Comfrey |
| Canary Island palm | Coralberry |
| Christmas cactus | Cotoneaster firethorn |
| Coffee tree | Crabapple |
| Corn plant | Dogwood |
| Creeping fig | Common, European or Red Elderberry |
| Danish ivy | Balsam, Douglas, Subalpine or White Fir |
| Devil's ivy | Grape vine |
| Dragon tree | Huckleberry |
| European fan palm | Marigold |
| Fiddle leaf fig | Nasturtium |
| Fig tree | Ponderosa, Spruce, Virginia, or White Pine |
| Flame nettle | Pyracantha |
| Hawaiian scheffler | Raspberry |
| Indian laurel | Rose |



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| Jade plant | Snowberry |
| Kangaroo vine | Black, Norway, Red, or White Spruce |
| Lace fern | Viburnum |
| Lady palm | Wax plant |
| Maidenhair fern | White poplar |
| Ming fern | Willow |
| Mother fern | |
| Mother-in-law's tongue | |
| Norfolk pine | |
| Paradise palm | |
| Parlor palm | |
| Pepperomia | |
| Prayer plant | |
| Purple passion | |
| Rubber tree | |
| Spider plant | |
| Umbrella tree | |
| Wandering Jew | |



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