

Safe and Dangerous Woods

I would like to thank Pat Zaccardi of Feathers & Fun, and she would like to express her appreciation to all of the folks on the following Onelist Groups (Now EGroups): Cockatoos, Conures, and Conurepics.

SAFE & UNSAFE WOOD FOR BIRDS (updated 10-24-00)

Wash all wood in a bleach solution, rinse then for small branches bake in oven at 250 for about 1 hour and for large branches wash, rinse and dry in direct sun.

SAFE

Acacia, Alder, Almond, Apple, Apricot (*see note below), Arbutus, Ash, Aspen, Bamboo, Beech, Birch, Bois d'arc (*see note below), Bottle Brush, Cherry (*see note below), Citrus, Cork Oak (*see note below), Cottonwood, Crabapple, Dogwood, Elm, Eucalyptus (*see note below), Fig Species, Fir, Fruitless Mulberry, Ginkgo, Grape Vines, Grape Palm, Guava, Hackberry, Hawthorn, Hazelnut, Hibiscus, Hickory, Horse Apple (*see note below), Ironwood, Larch, Lilac, Liquidamber, Madrona, Magnolia, Manzanita, Maple, Mediterranean Laurel, Mesquite (remove thorns), Mimosa, Mulberry, Nectarine (*see note below), Norfolk Island Pine, Nut (except Chestnut & Oak), Oak (wood only, no bark or leaves), (*see note below), Palm, Papaya, Peach (*see note below), Pear, Pecan, Pine, Plum (*see note below), Poplar, Prune (*see note below), Ribbonwood, Rose, Sassafras, Sequoia (redwood) (*see note below), Spruce, Sweet Gum, Sycamore, Thurlow, Tree fern, Umbrella tree, Vine Maple, Walnut (Black Walnut may be dangerous), Willow (Goat, Pussy & Weeping)

A couple of woods appear on safe lists that shouldn't or should be noted that there are problems with some species. Redwood has long been associated with rashes and the dust with lung and eye disorders. It contains high levels of volatile oils that are known toxins. Further exposure is believed to suppress the immune system.

UNSAFE

Box Elder Wood: UNSAFE

Chinese Popcorn/Chinese Tallow: UNSAFE Hemlock: UNSAFE (see note below) Sumac: UNSAFE (aka Rhus/Toxicodendron)

Black Locust has been cited as causing some toxic reactions with birds, though members of this species are also known as the Acacia, which is listed as safe.

Gillian Willis on her website says "Do not use apricot, cherry, peach, prune, plum or nectarine. These trees all belong to the Prunus species. They contain cyanogenic glycosides which release cyanide if ingested.

There is some disagreement over whether cherry, oak and eucalyptus are toxic. However the wood should be safe but avoid the leaves and seeds and in the case of oak and cherry the bark as well. (Safety on Cherry is questionable)

London Tree is in the sycamore family, and is currently under research.

Do not give the birds redwood. The oils the wood contains are toxic. But the biggest problem is if they get a splinter, redwood tends to block the immune response and they become infected quite easily. Oak appears on a number of toxic lists, primarily because of the tannin in the leaves and acorns. In the writer's opinion this is totally unjustified, the wood should be perfectly fine as it is not generally eaten and contains little tannin in most species.

Cork Oak - (again avoid foliage and acorns) the bark of cork oak is safe for consumption even by humans whose tolerance for tannin is much lower than most bird species.

Cork Oak is a safe wood to leave the bark on. Cork oak has very low levels of tannin (far lower than other oaks) and the bark is

just what the name says 'Cork' Cork Oak is originally from southern Europe and is the source of all natural cork. The bark is very thick and well, cork like. It can be found wherever there are old wine growing areas as it was grown to provide corks for the bottles. It is also found scattered around the southeastern US and California. Because of its very low tannin content it is safe for use in food storage (the cork in the wine bottle, oil bottles, etc.) There is a similar species found native to North America, the

Prairie Oak a variety of live oak is found throughout the great plains and east to Ohio. It has a very thick cork like bark, however I do not know what the safety factor for this species would be. Information on the composition of woods and related materials can be found in a number of publications, I don't remember the names off hand, but any university that has a good botany or agronomy department, or your university agricultural extension service should be able to direct you to the appropriate references. When I was researching the safe woods for our birds the Calif State University Fresno Agricultural Dept was more than helpful, completely willing to answer any questions I had and to help me find the references.

Eucalyptus - while it appears on many toxic lists I have never been able to find a good reason for it being there. The level of phenols (the toxic elements in eucalyptus) is lower than in many pine species which are considered perfectly safe. While you might want to avoid the foliage there doesn't appear to be any reason to do so. Considering that many lorikeet and cockatoo species eat the flowers and new leaves in the wild, and that it is

the dominant native wood for Australia concern over it's toxicity seems exaggerated.

Oak (except Tan Oak which should be avoided because of the VERY high tannin content) though there is some controversy about Oak it appears that the wood should be safe. the bark leaves and especially the acorns have much higher levels of tannins and should be avoided. While many bird species including many parrots regularly feed on nuts and vegetation that have levels of tannin much higher than oaks, it is unclear how their bodies deal with the substance and it is therefore probably advisable to avoid high doses.

Cherry - this one is really controversial. there are confirmed cases of dogs and of horses having fatal reactions to eating cherry wood. However I have been unable to find any confirmed report of bird fatalities. Regardless the sap is what contains the toxic elements (see Gillians Help pages) and that is contained primarily in the Cambium, a layer of material just below the bark. If cherry is to be used it should be dry, debarked and any traces of sap removed. Under no circumstances should fresh cherry, the foliage or bark be given to birds.

Ginkgo - While the female Ginkgo may have an unpleasant smell the wood, bark and foliage all appear to be safe.

Hemlock - The wood that is sold in lumber yards (sometimes called Hem Fir) is safe but the foliage is toxic. No other species of hemlock should be considered safe.

Chinese Magnolia - The wood, foliage and flowers all appear to be safe, but I have been unable to confirm this. According to CSUF biologist and agronomists they could see no reason to consider it dangerous (it is not a known toxic plant) but know of no reason to consider it completely safe either.

Cedar occasionally appears on safe lists. If Cedar is to be used, Red cedar should be avoided for the same reasons as redwood. Yellow and Sitka Cedar may be safe though.

Laurel appears on most toxic lists. Most Laurel species are toxic but the Mediterranean Laurel is safe. Distinguishing the species can be difficult though and unless the species is known absolutely it should be avoided.

One plant that deserves mention as it occasionally appears in gardens as an exotic ornamental is the Chinese Snake Tree. This is a VERY TOXIC plant and even contact with the sap (through the skin) can present the risk of fatality to small animals and children. It is sometimes called the Lacquer plant because it was the source of lacquer.

Also to be avoided is the Pitch Pine. It was the source material for turpentine and has VERY high levels of phenols. Contact with the wood can cause rashes and the fumes from burning it have been known to cause lung and eye disorders.

Bois d'arc, which is also called the Horse Apple tree, and this is in the Mulberry family and is a safe wood but I had to write a lot of bird folks.