

Plants For Your Bird Aviary

In an aviary keep potted plants out of beak reach

By Susan Chamberlain

Q: I would like to add some plants to my bird aviary. Do you have a list of poisonous and non-poisonous plants, or can you tell me where to get a list?

At first glance, this reader's request is easy. BIRD TALK frequently features lists of toxic and nontoxic plants. Many bird-care books and online resources also list plants believed to be safe or unsafe to display where birds are present.

A planted aviary can be beautiful and beneficial to the pet birds inside, but also consider other factors when adding plants and soil to the avian environment: climate, bird species, aviary size and location. You don't mention whether your aviary is indoors or outdoors. If outdoors, are the plants and soil in a sheltered area or open to sunshine and the elements? Does the aviary have a soil, gravel or concrete floor? How large are the birds? While small birds often find refuge in sheltering branches, larger parrots may simply shred the leaves and strip the bark from tree limbs.

I'm not a big fan of planted indoor aviaries because it is difficult to control mold and mildew in a humid, controlled environment. Unless scrupulously cleaned up each day, leaves from plants, bird droppings and discarded foodstuffs contribute to bacterial growth and development of mold on soil and plant parts. Insects and rodents will be attracted to this banquet, as well. Transpiration from the plants adds moisture to the air, thereby creating an environment even more hospitable to mold and mildew.

I prefer to use potted greenery where birds are housed indoors. Strategically placed on the floor or hanging from ceiling hooks, the plants add a note of tropical beauty, yet they easily can be relocated out of a bird's 'bombing' range or moved outside for cleaning and maintenance. Such maintenance might include showering the plants to remove droppings, dander, stuck-on food and predatory insects such as spider mites or mealy bugs.

I repot my plants annually, or when they become root bound. I use clean pots and sterile potting soil to reduce risk of mold and other contaminants. Although many veterinarians advise against providing pet birds with grit or gravel, I add a layer of bird gravel on top of the soil in the pots. It looks attractive and prevents errant birds from foraging in the soil itself. My birds are not at liberty except under my supervision, so there is little danger that they'll gorge themselves on gravel. Another way to reduce development of mold on soil is to spray it lightly with white vinegar from time to time. Adequate ventilation, sunshine and the use of an air filter also will help improve the air quality in an indoor aviary.

Outdoor aviaries may offer more options, depending on your climate and the size and design of the aviary. Wind, rain and sunlight all contribute to the maintenance and health of the plants and birds inside. Choose nontoxic, insect-resistant, native plants that grow well in your area. If the enclosure is large, you may even add trees and shrubbery. A friend's huge southwest Florida aviary contains a pond, trees, landing platforms for the parrots and a flock of Guinea hens to help keep the insects at bay. Another friend's aviary has a concrete floor for easy maintenance, but the plantings outside the aviary make it look just as beautiful as if the plants were inside. Some of the plants, such as fruit trees and palms even provide treats for the birds.

Take stock of your space and budget limitations, and consult local nursery sources for advice on specific plants. Be sure to ask about pesticides or fertilizers that may have been applied prior to purchase. If you belong to a bird club, brainstorm with members with planted aviaries. Confer with members of a local garden club, horticultural society or county cooperative extension service for more advice and ask your avian veterinarian for recommendations as well.

Dig These Plants

The following are nontoxic plants. Remember, any plant can cause harm if your bird consumes a large enough amount of it. Talk with your avian vet if you have concerns about particular plants.

African Daisy — *Arctotis stoechadifolia*
African Violet — *Saintpaulina* spp.
Aloe — *Aloe* spp. (flesh only)
Ash — *Fraxinus* spp.

Aspen — *Populus* spp.
 Baby's Breath — *Gypsophila paniculata*
 Beech — *Fagus*, *Nothofagus*
 Birch — *Betula* spp.
 Boston Fern — *Nephrolepis bostoniensis*
 Bromeliads — *Ananas comosus*
 Calendula (Pot Marigold) *Calendula officinalis*
 California Holly — *Heteromeles arbutifolia*
 Chamomile — *Chamaemelum nobile*
 Corn Plant — *Dracaena fragrans*
 Croton (house variety) — *Codiaeum variegatum*
 Dandelion — *Taraxacum officinalis*
 Elm — *Ulmus* spp.
 Eucalyptus — *Eucalyptus* species
 Fir — *Abies* spp.
 Gardenia — *Gardenia jasminoides*
 Garlic — *Allium sativum*
 Grape Vine — *Vitis* spp.
 Honeysuckle — *Lonicera* spp.
 Impatiens — *Impatiens* spp.
 Jade Plant — *Crassula ovata*
 Kalanchoe — *Kalanchoe clossfeldiana*
 Larch — *Larix* spp.
 Lemon balm — *Melissa officinalis*
 Lilac — *Syringa vulgaris* and related species
 Lily (Easter or Tiger) — *Lilium* spp.
 Magnolia — *Magnolia* spp.
 Manzanita — *Arctostaphylos manzanita*
 Marigold — *Tagetes* spp.
 Nasturtium — *Tropaeolum majus*
 Norfolk Island Pine — *Araucaria excelsa*
 Parsley — *Petroselinum* spp.
 Peppermint — *Mentha x piperita*
 Petunia — *Petunia* spp.
 Rose — *Rosa* spp.
 Spider Plant — *Chlorophytum comosum*
 Violet — *Viola* spp.

Keep Away From These Plants

The following are a few toxic plants. Contact your avian vet if you have concerns.

Amaryllis — *Amaryllis* spp.
 Avocado — *Persea americana* (pit, leaves, unripe fruit, and stems)
 Bird of Paradise — *Poinciana* and related spp. (seed pods and flowers)
 Calla Lily — *Zantedeschia aethiopica*
 Cherry — *Prunus* spp., (pits, leaves, and bark)
 Daffodil — *Narcissus tazetta*
 Figs — *Ficus* spp.
 Hydrangea — *Hydrangea* spp.
 Iris — *Iris* spp.
 Ivy (Boston, English and some others) — *Hedera* spp.
 Marijuana — *Cannabis sativa*
 Mistletoe — *Phoradendron villosum*
 Mushrooms — *Amanita* spp. and many others
 Narcissus — *Narcissus* spp.
 Oak — *Quercus* spp.
 Peach — *Prunus persica* (leaves, pit, bark)
 Pear — *Pyrus* spp. (leaves, seeds, bark)
 Potato — *Solanum tuberosum* (sprouts, leaves, berries, green tubers)
 Tomato — *Lycopersicon esculentum* (stems and leaves)