

## Safe Wood for Perches

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What is safe for toys and perches? (Some trees you might not ever see or use.)

### **Purportedly Safe:**

Acacia  
Almond  
Apple  
Arbutus  
Ash  
Aspen  
Bambo  
Beech  
Birch  
Citrus  
Cork Oak  
Cottonwood  
Crab apple  
Dogwood  
Elm  
Fig  
Fir  
Fruitless Mulberry  
Ginkgo  
Grape Vines  
Grape Palm  
Guava  
Hackberry  
Hazelnut  
Hibiscus  
Hickory  
Ironwood  
Larch  
Lilac  
Liquidamber  
Madrona  
Magnolia  
Manzanita  
Maple  
Mediterranean Laurel  
Mesquite  
Mimosa  
Mulberry  
Norfolk Island Pine  
Oak

Palm  
Papaya  
Pear  
Pecan  
Pine  
Poplar  
Ribbonwood  
Rose  
Sassafras  
Spruce  
Sweet Gum  
Sycamore  
Thurlo  
Tree Fern  
Umbrella Tree  
Vine Maple  
Walnut  
Wilow

**Allegedly toxic:**

Apricot  
Bis d'arc  
Cherry  
Eucalyptus  
Horse Apple  
Nectarine  
Peach  
Plum  
Prune  
Sequoia  
Sitka cedar  
Yellow cedar

**Unequivocally toxic:**

Box Elder  
Crepe Myrtle  
Chinese Popcorn  
Chinese snake tree  
Chinese Tallow  
Hemlock  
Holly  
Laurel

Pitch pine  
Redwood  
Sumac (Rhus/Toxicodendron)  
Yew

### **Conflicting information**

Oak is bad because of plant tanins but parrot toys made of leather tanned with plant tanins are good. Fruit such as red grapes are good in the diet but red grapes contain plant tanins. Ethanol is toxic but is present in ripe/over-ripe fruit. Parrots like fruit and it's good for them. Can anyone sort this out ?!

### **Wood:**

Some people would have you believe that the only chemical nasties in the world are man made and anything 'natural' is automatically safe. Not so! Many plants wage violent chemical warfare on each other and on the animals that might eat them.

This can make it tricky finding suitable materials for toys and perches. The whole issue is fraught with difficulty and conjecture. For one thing, many sources of information are from north America where the species of trees are different from those found in Europe.

Another problem concerns the loose use of common names which may mean different things to different people. On top of that, how good is your botany - are you sure you have correctly identified your target tree ? Conflicting information Oak is bad because of plant tanins but parrot toys made of leather tanned with plant tanins are good. Fruit such as red grapes are good in the diet but red grapes contain plant tanins. Ethanol is toxic but is present in ripe/over-ripe fruit. Parrots like fruit and it's good for them. Can anyone sort this out ?!

For making wooden toys you may find the information on the right, culled from searching the internet a handy starting guide.

While the wood from these trees may be considered to be chemically non-toxic, spines, wood fibres and splinters may pose a physical problem. Bamboo (which is actually a grass, not a tree) can have very sharp edges. Branches gathered from the countryside may carry fungi or parasites in bird droppings and need to be washed. We advise using a nail brush with antibacterial washing up liquid and/or avian disinfectant. Personally I cut fresh tree branches rather than use windfalls: hopefully this reduces the probability of mycotoxins.

Do not to use wood from Prunus spp. trees because it contains cyanogenic glycosides. Such trees include: apricot, cherry, nectarine, peach, prune and plum but the Birdsafe site reports no confirmed bird deaths. Oak is reputedly dangerous because of tannin content but confoundingly, tannin levels are much higher in other foods eaten by birds such as some nuts. In both these cases it appears to be the bark, foliage and sap that is the problem so the dried and debarked wood may be OK but best avoided to be on the safe side.

The chinese snake tree, pitch pine (from which turpentine is made) and yew are all to be considered highly toxic, as are most laurels.

Unfortunately, while there is a lot of assertion on the internet that this or that is/is not safe and only a little balanced assessment, it seems very difficult to find authoritative substantiation of the claims.

It would be nice to know: what active principle(s) in the wood are responsible for the toxicity; what dose level is considered toxic; what differences there may be between species, sizes and ages of parrot; who did the toxicologic analysis and where was it published.

Without this, there is a danger that some of the things that are said to be toxic may not be all that bad and worse still, some of those that are allegedly safe may not be. It is surprising, for instance, to see willow widely regarded as safe but it is a rich source of salicylic acid (the latin name for Willow is Salix) and is used medicinally to good effect. However, in man anyway, salicylates can cause gastro-intestinal bleeding.

Toxicity is not a simple matter of what but also involves how much and how often: you can kill yourself (and your parrot) with organic carrots if you really want to.

A good choice of wood: Apple and beech, occasionally spruce or ash.  
Always check before you buy new wood.

Good luck