

Bird Safety Corner

Essential Oils

Essential oils are something every bird companion needs to know about. These oils, also known as **volatile oils**, are derived from plants by using solvents. Sounds healthy, right? Some people even refer to them as "natural", which always sounds like something we'd all want. Remember, though, that botulism is also "natural"! Essential oils can be very toxic if aerosolized or heated and can cause irritation, stimulation or depression of the central nervous system, and even death in birds. Birds cannot process many of the chemicals we tolerate, particular gases and fumes.



So where do we find essential oils? Unfortunately their use is widespread. Common sources are **plug-in air fresheners, carpet fresheners, car air fresheners, aromatherapy, perfumes, cosmetics, bath oils, potpourri, candles, incense** and **citronella**. There have been numerous cases of bird deaths from plug-in air fresheners, in particular. The jury is still out about Febreze, but if in doubt, don't use something. Those little dangling pine trees you hang in your car should not be used if transporting birds. Candles are discussed in another column. Just remember that if you can smell something with a perfume-like odor, it is probably not safe for your birds.

People like to have **potpourri** around the house, especially during the holidays, but fortunately there are safe alternatives which look and smell as nice, but don't endanger your birds. You can boil herbs such as mint, cloves, or cinnamon to give your house a nice fresh smell, though make sure you cover that pot and keep your birds away from the stove! You can also make a sachet or bowl with rose petals and hips, dried lavender, herbs, lemon, cinnamon sticks, cloves, basil, allspice, bay leaves, orange peels, and vanilla extract, or use a "mulling spice" potpourri. Just don't add any oils!



One parting word about **tea tree oil (melaleuca oil)** - despite claims about its health benefits, it's very toxic and should never be used on or near birds.

Some of these items are covered in more depth in other columns, but this covers the "essentials" about "essential oils".

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