

Bird Safety Corner

Candles

Everyone loves the romantic glow of a flickering candle. Unfortunately, however, most candles can be very hazardous to the well-being of your birds.

Let's talk about what makes up a candle. A candle is a block of **wax** with an embedded **wick**. Most candles are made from paraffin, which is derived from petroleum. Unless it is highly refined, paraffin does not burn cleanly and releases smoke and soot into the air when burned. Beeswax burns at a lower temperature, burns more cleanly, and releases fewer particles into the air. Candle wax can also be made from soy, other plant waxes, and tallow. Gel candles are made from mineral oil and a polymer.



Wicks used to be made from lead, but this is not commonly used anymore. Instead, most wicks are made from zinc or zinc alloy, which can be quite toxic to birds when burned. Paper and cotton are also used, with untreated cotton being the safest for birds.

Candles often have additives, such as fragrances, colors, essential oils, and other hazardous ingredients. Essential oils were covered in a previous column and should always be avoided around birds.

So when you burn most candles around birds, you are exposing them to smoke, soot, zinc, essential oils, and more! Obviously this is a real problem. So, how can you enjoy your candles without harming your birds? Simple! Beeswax!

Beeswax candles burn clean and are much safer than paraffin candles. You'll want to use those candles that have only cotton wicks and no additives, colors, fragrances, or oils. Beeswax

burns with a natural honey aroma that is quite pleasant. Without additives, it is hypoallergenic and safe for everyone. One company, **The Birds and the Bees Bird-Safe Candles**, specializes in candles that meet all these criteria. They come in many different sizes, shapes, and varieties and are sold by Avitec (www.avitec.com/category-s/29.htm).



Beeswax candles are becoming more and more common these days, and are often found at craft fairs and in specialty shops. Before you buy them, however, ask about the wick and if

there are any additives, especially essential oils. Just because they are touted as "natural" does NOT mean that they are safe for your birds!

Two more things about candles. Even though beeswax is much safer than regular candles, you should not put the candles right next to your parrots since even beeswax gives off some smoke, which is never good for bird respiratory systems. Also remember that candles are one of the leading sources of residential fires in the U.S., and a loose parrot and a lit candle are a recipe for disaster even if it's a bird-safe candle!

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