"BEST PRACTICE" Opinion:

Plant Materials

Question: Is this tree/plant/flower okay near my play area?
Answer: Perhaps!

The Canadian Playground Standard includes recommendations specific to this issue within it Annex G.

> **CAN/CSA-Z614, National Standard of Canada for Children's Playspaces and Equipment**
> **Annex G – G.8 Plant materials in children's playspaces.**

It is my opinion and position that Natural elements should be encouraged and welcomed into any play environment. An open and empty playspace simply does not have interest or intrigue to a child of any age.

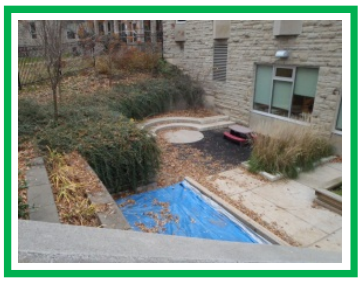
However, with that said there must also be a balance between the inclusion of plant materials and the more serious aspects of risk and hazards. Most plants that are hazardous are easily recognizable (re: thorns, berries, etc) however for most of us unfamiliar with their properties, many are not! As such the above mentioned CSA Standard includes a list of plants that have been recognized as problematic and should be avoided. For your convenience I have included that list within the following pages of this note.

My first suggestion is to identify and recognize the purpose or intent of the considered elements.

- Are your plant selections intended for shade? (most common, and most welcomed)
- Are your plant selections intended for cosmetic appearance only? (or are the children expected to be in contact with them?)
- Are your plant selections intended for playspace divisions? (re: hedges, fence-rows)
- Are your plant selections intended for learning/teaching activities?
- Are your plant selections intended for bird/butterfly attraction?
- Are your plant selections intended for consumption by the children? (re: vegetable gardens)

IMPORTANT: In my experience there is a fine line between plant materials that are beneficial and those that are harmful. Material selection, and regular maintenance are the biggest factors in crossing that line.

- Are the plant materials that you have selected actually functioning as you have intended?
- Are the plant materials that are present intrusive, or unintended? (re: weeds, fungus, mushrooms)
- Are any of plant materials that are present found on the following "to-be-avoided" list?



mushrooms

over-grown

fungus

weeds

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G.8 Plant materials in children's playspaces

G.8.1 Choice

Plant materials appropriate for the climate and purpose should be chosen. Hardy varieties will survive in play areas if healthy specimens of a reasonable size are selected.

Pest-resistant varieties should be selected to avoid the use of pesticides. Plant materials can provide interest to playspaces. Plants that attract birds and plants that provide colour in winter and fall can be selected, in addition to evergreens and conifers. Where children are likely to come into contact with vegetation, plants with thorny or prickly parts should be avoided.

G.8.2 Poisonous/hazardous plants

Poisonous or hazardous plants shall not be used.

As an extra precaution, a poison information centre should be consulted before the selection of plant materials is finalized.

G.8.3 Installation and maintenance of plant material

Grouped plants or trees are less likely to be damaged. Therefore, plant materials should not be planted singly, particularly in the midst of a physical play zone.

Mature plants can be massed or clustered to serve as dividers, visual screens, or wind shelters. Deciduous trees can be planted on the south edge to provide shade in the summer and allow warming by the sun in the winter.

Young plants should be provided with good protection until they are established. Guy wires should not be used for such protection where children can run into them or trip on them.

Plants in playgrounds should be regularly tended and inspected. Sharp edges, broken branches, or any projections at head level should be trimmed off. Any spraying of herbicides or insecticides should be done in accordance with the regulations of the federal Department of Agriculture and of the provincial or municipal governments, and according to the manufacturer's instructions.

G.8.4 Plant list

Table G.1 can serve as a general guideline for identifying those plants that should be avoided in children's playspaces.

Although there are toxic elements in the fruit, foliage, and roots of about 700 documented plants found in North America, children are more likely to be attracted to brightly coloured fruits than to other parts. A general rule of thumb is to avoid any plants with white berries, whether or not they appear in Table G.1.

Table G.1
Plants to be avoided in children's playspaces
(See Clause G.8.4.)

Botanical name	Common name (type of plant)
Plants with poisonous fruits	
Actea pachypoda	White baneberry, Cohosh (perennial)
Actea rubra	Red baneberry, Red cohosh (perennial)
Actea spicata	Black baneberry (perennial)
Daphne mezereum	February daphne (shrub)
Euonymus americana	Strawberry bush, Wahoo (shrub)
Euonymus atropurpurea	Eastern wahoo (large shrub)
Euonymus europaea	Spindle tree (bush or small tree)
Hedera helix	English ivy (vine)
Hydrangea sp.	Hydrangea (shrub)
Ilex sp.	Holly (shrub)
Lathyrus sp.	Sweet pea (annual or perennial)
Leucothoe sp.	Leucothoe (shrub)
Menispermum canadense	Common moonseed (vine)
Phoradendron serotinum	American mistletoe (tree parasite)
Phytolacca americana	Pokeweed, Inkberry (perennial)
Podophyllum peltatum	Mayapple, Mandrake (perennial)
Rhamnus sp.	Buckthorn (shrub or tree)
Rhodotypos scandens	Jetbead (shrub)
Ricinus communis	Castor bean (annual)
Robinia pseudoacacia	Black locust (tree)
Rhus radicans	Poison ivy (vine)
Rhus vernix	Poison sumac (shrub)
Solanum dulcamara	Deadly nightshade (vine)
Symphoricarpos	Snowberry, Waxberry (shrub)
Taxus sp.	Yew (shrub or small tree)
Wisteria sp.	Wisteria (vine)

(Continued)

Table G.1 (Continued)

Botanical name	Common name (type of plant)
Plants with poisonous foliage	
Aconitum sp.	Aconite, Monkshood (perennial)
Anemone sp.	Anemone (perennial)
Azalea sp.	Azalea, Rhododendron (shrub)
Buxus sp.	Box, Boxwood (shrub)
Cicuta maculata	Water hemlock (perennial)
Clematis sp.	Clematis (perennial vine)
Conium maculatum	Poison hemlock (biennial)
Datura stramonium	Jimsonweed, Thornapple (annual)
Delphinium sp.	Larkspur (biennial)
Digitalis purpurea	Foxglove (biennial)
Euphorbia cyparrissias	Cypress spurge (perennial)
Euphorbia marginata	Snow-on-the-mountain (annual)
Helleborus sp.	Hellebore, Christmas rose (perennial)
Kalmia sp.	Lambkill, Mountain laurel (shrub)
Ligustrum sp.	Privet (shrub)
Lobelia sp.	Lobelia (annual or perennial)
Morus rubra	Red mulberry (tree)
Parthenocissus quinquefolia	Virginia creeper (vine)
Pieris sp.	Andromeda (shrub)
Prunus serotina	Black cherry, Rum cherry (tree)
Ranunculus sp.	Buttercup (perennial)
Rheum rhubarbium	Rhubarb (only leaves are toxic)
Rhus radicans	Poison ivy (vine)
Rhus vernix	Poison sumac (shrub)
Rudbeckia sp.	Coneflower, Black-eyed Susan (perennial)
Sambucus canadensis	American elder (shrub)
Sanguinaria canadensis	Bloodroot (perennial)
Shepherdia sp.	Buffaloberry (large shrub)
Solanum tuberosum	Potato (new shoots only)
Vinca sp.	Periwinkle (ground cover)

(Continued)

Table G.1 (Concluded)

Botanical name	Common name (type of plant)
Plants with poisonous roots, stems, or seeds	
Arisaema tryphyllum	Jack-in-the-pulpit (perennial)
Camassia sp.	Death camass (bulb)
Colchicum autumnale	Autumn crocus (bulb)
Convallaria majalis	Lily-of-the-valley (perennial)
Dicentra sp.	Bleeding heart (perennial)
Endymion sp.	English bluebell, Squill (bulb)
Galanthus sp.	Snowdrop (bulb)
Gloriosa superba	Glory lily (perennial)
Gymnocladus dioica	Kentucky coffeetree (large tree)
Hyacinth sp.	Hyacinth (bulb)
Ipomoea sp.	Morning glory (annual vine)
Iris sp.	Iris, Flag (corm)
Laburnum anagyroides	Goldenchain (tree)
Narcissus sp.	Narcissus, Daffodil (bulb)
Ornithogalum umbellatum	Star-of-Bethlehem (bulb)
Phytolacca americana	Pokeweed (perennial)
Podophyllum peltatum	Mayapple, Mandrake (perennial)
Scilla sp.	Scilla, Bluebell (bulb)

G.8.5 Toxic fungi

All mushrooms and fungi that appear in a playspace should be treated with suspicion because their identification is highly specialized and outside the scope of this Standard. Caregivers should be familiar at least with the one mushroom that is responsible for the great majority of fungus poisonings in Canada, the Amanita virosa ("Destroying Angel"). All parts of this mushroom (i.e., cap, gills, and stem) are white in colour, and any such mushrooms found should be removed immediately. The familiar red mushroom with white spots, the Amanita muscaria ("Fly Agaric"), is also considered poisonous and should be removed.