

Poisonous Plants and Fallible Foods

Watch What Your Pet Eats

Pets are genetically configured to be curious eaters. In the wild, this has an advantage. But in the company of humans—where we surround ourselves with a wide variety of decorative plants and exotic foods—it can cause serious health issues for them.

This guide was written and compiled from a variety of sources and is certainly not comprehensive or authoritative.* Our hope is that it provides a starting point for a conversation that all responsible pet owners should have with their pet healthcare professional.

House and Garden Plants

Many plants are poisonous if eaten and can cause symptoms ranging from mild discomfort to death. Below is a list of some of the most common plants that sicken pets.

Aloe Vera

The leaves of the aloe vera plant offer quick relief for burns, but eating these plants can cause vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite, changes in urine color and tremors in both dogs and cats.

Amaryllis

These flowering plants provide a splash of color during the holiday season, but they can be poisonous to pets. Keep bulbs out of the reach of your cats and dogs, as these are the most toxic part of the plant. Sampling an amaryllis plant can cause drooling, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, tremors and depression.



Azalea and Rhododendron

Eating azalea or rhododendron plants can cause symptoms that range from mild to life threatening. The severity of the symptoms vary depending on how much of the plant your cat or dog eats, but it only takes a small amount to make an animal sick. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, loss of appetite, abnormal heart rate, weakness, abdominal pain, tremors, blindness, seizures and comas.

Baby's Breath

Found often in floral arrangements, these white flowers can cause vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, lethargy and depression if they are ingested.

Buttercups

Cheerful yellow buttercups certainly do not look very threatening, but they can cause drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, tremors or seizures if eaten. Buttercup flowers are very bitter and cause mouth ulcers. In most cases, pets decide that buttercups are not so tasty after all, after a few bites.

Crocus

Generally, there are two types of crocus plants—those that bloom in the Spring and those that bloom in the Autumn. Neither is good for your pet, however the Spring variety is more likely to cause gastro-intestinal distress, diarrhea, and vomiting. Not good, but recoverable. The Autumn

blooming variety is more seriously toxic, sometimes resulting in internal bleeding, potential organ damage, and can even be fatal. Immediate emergency attention is required.

Daffodils

The bulbs are also the most toxic part of daffodils. If your pet eats a daffodil, it may experience drooling, vomiting and diarrhea. Eating several daffodils can cause low blood pressure, heart arrhythmias, tremors and convulsions.

Holly, Mistletoe, and Poinsettias

Eating one of these classic holiday plants can cause a range of symptoms. Although poinsettias have a bad reputation, eating them really only causes mild irritation to the mouth or stomach. Mistletoe is more dangerous. Eating it can result in gastrointestinal disorders, heart problems, hallucinations, vomiting and diarrhea. Consuming holly can also cause vomiting and diarrhea, but your pet may be most annoyed by the tiny cuts caused by the spiny leaves.

Lilies

All lilies are bad for pets. Peace, Peruvian/Inca, and Calla lilies normally cause allergy-like symptoms, drooling, and tissue irritation. True lilies—including Tiger, Aster, Japanese, and other types common to flower arrangements—are very toxic (especially for cats). Also be aware of Lily of the Valley which, while not a “true” lily, is also toxic—causing symptoms similar to foxglove/digitalis involving heart failure.

Morning Glories

You may notice some very unusual behavior if your pet eats morning glories. Symptoms include hallucinations, stomach upset, tremors, loss of appetite and difficulty controlling movements or balance.

Mountain Laurel

Mountain laurel plants produce attractive flowers in the spring, but eating these plants can be deadly. If your pet consumes mountain laurel, it may begin to drool and experience vomiting, diarrhea, heart rhythm abnormalities, tremors, coma and even death.

Oleander

Oleander is a very common shrub in warmer climates. It is also commonly known to be toxic to pets and humans. Fortunately, the leaves and flowers have a very unpleasant taste and texture and so are not normally ingested by pets. But if a pet does eat oleander, immediate veterinary attention is needed.

Tomato Plant

If your pet cannot resist eating the leaves and stems of a tomato plant, you may notice drooling, loss of appetite, diarrhea, drowsiness, confusion, weakness, slow heart rate, dilated pupils or changes in behavior.

Tulips

Munching on a tulip bulb can cause stomach problems, loss of appetite, drooling, convulsions and cardiac problems.

What Do You Do?

If you are concerned that your pet has eaten a dangerous plant, contact your vet immediately. The sooner treatment begins, the more likely that the outcome will be positive.

No-no Foods

It's a rare pet parent who has never slipped a treat to a pet. After all, those pleading eyes are awfully hard to ignore when you are enjoying your favorite meal. Unfortunately, some foods that are perfectly healthy for humans can cause serious health problems for pets. Keep your pet in good health by making these three foods off limits.

Alcohol

Surprisingly, this is a real problem. Good-intentioned pet owners sometimes share their adult beverages with their pets. Sometimes it is sharing a beer on game-day or pouring champagne into the dog dish on New Years Eve. But it can even be feeding foods to pets that contain alcohol. Many desserts like tiramisu, bananas foster, and cherries jubilee contain alcohol. And alcohol can also be present in marinades and other sauces. Don't take any chances ... avoid exposing your pet to any alcohol.

Chocolate

Chocolate contains theobromine and caffeine are both types of methylxanthines, which are substances that are toxic to pets. Although most cats have no interest in chocolate, your dog may be happy to help you finish a box of chocolates. Eating chocolate can cause vomiting, diarrhea, fever, rigid muscles, rapid breathing, increased heart rate, low blood pressure, seizures, and death. Symptoms vary depending on the amount and type of chocolate consumed and your pet's weight. Baking chocolate contains the highest amount of caffeine and theobromine, followed by semi-sweet chocolate and milk chocolate.

Onions, Garlic and Chives

These root plants make human food VERY tasty, but can be harmful to our pets. Eating onions, garlic, and chives can cause an upset stomach and can also damage your pet's red blood cells. Although cats generally suffer the most if they consume these foods, dogs can also be affected if they eat enough onions, garlic or chives.

Grapes and Raisins

Both grapes and raisins can cause kidney damage and should never be given to pets.

Macadamia Nuts

You should not let your pet eat any variety of nut, but macadamia nuts in particular are quite harmful, potentially causing vomiting, diarrhea, and even hyperthermia (overheating).

Summary

Again, we want to stress that this is NOT a comprehensive list and the your pet's reaction to various foods and plants may be more or less severe. We strongly recommend that you use this as a conversation-starter on your next vet visit so that we can all do a better job keeping the pets we love safe and healthy.

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