

HEALTH MATTERS

Safety First

Pet Poison Helpline, the only poison control center staffed by board-certified veterinary specialists in internal medicine, emergency critical care, and veterinary toxicology, tells us how to keep our dogs safe this summer.



Ssshhh...
Don't tell Mom
and Dad I've
been digging in
the garden!

Protecting Pets from Poisons in the Yard and Garden

After an unseasonably warm winter, many gardens and yards around the country are growing and blossoming well ahead of schedule. Outdoor enthusiasts, who are also pet owners, are delighted with the early onset of spring, enjoying their outdoor living spaces while watching their pets run and play. The veterinary and toxicology experts at Pet Poison Helpline would like to keep pets safe this spring and summer by informing pet owners of potentially harmful substances, flowers, and plants that are dangerous to dogs and cats.

"Many of the calls that we receive at Pet Poison Helpline

this time of year involve pet ingestions of yard and garden products that may have harmful chemicals or ingredients," said Ahna Brutlag, DVM, MS, assistant director at Pet Poison Helpline. "Additional yard-related emergencies involve pets that have dug into and ingested the contents of compost piles, or consumed various plants and flowers that can be poisonous."

Some of the most common potentially harmful dangers for pets that reside in many yards and gardens are listed below.

Mulch Products

Cocoa bean mulch is made of discarded hulls or

shells of the cocoa bean, which are by-products of chocolate production. The tempting "chocolate-like" smell often attracts dogs and may encourage them to eat the mulch. Processed cocoa bean hulls can contain theobromine and caffeine, the two toxins of concern in chocolate.

Unfortunately, determining the amount of toxins in mulch can be difficult, as it varies greatly from product to product. Many varieties contain very low amounts of the toxins and are not as dangerous as dog owners are often led to believe; however, varieties with higher toxin concentrations can cause

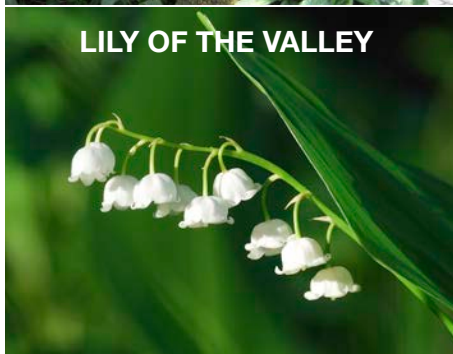
vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, an abnormal heart rhythm, seizures, and in extreme cases, death. Since it is not usually apparent how much of the toxin the mulch contains, it's best to keep dogs a safe distance away, to always supervise your pet while outside, or to not use the mulch at all.

Fertilizers, Soil Additives, and Pesticides

While fertilizers are typically fairly safe for pets, those that contain blood meal, bone meal, feather meal, and iron may be especially tasty – and dangerous to dogs. Large ingestions of the meal-containing products can form a concretion in the stomach, potentially obstructing the gastrointestinal tract and causing severe pancreatitis, and those that contain iron may result in iron poisoning. Also, ingestion of pesticides and insecticides, especially if they contain organophosphates (often found in systemic rose care products), can be life-threatening, even when ingested in small amounts.

Slug and Snail Baits

Available in a variety of forms (pellets, granular, powder, and liquid), slug and snail baits contain the active ingredient metaldehyde, which is highly poisonous to dogs and cats. When ingested, metaldehyde produces clinical signs of distress within one to two hours, including



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Ingestion of pesticides and insecticides can be life-threatening.

salivation, restlessness, vomiting, tremors, seizures, and life-threateningly high body temperature. These baits are highly toxic and, without immediate veterinary attention, symptoms can last for several days and can be fatal.

Compost

Gardeners love their compost; however, it can be toxic to pets and wildlife, so please keep it fenced off. As the organic matter decomposes, it is common for molds to grow, some of which produce hazardous tremor-causing toxins. When consumed by an animal, moldy food or compost ingestion can result in sickness and physical distress in as little as 30 minutes. Symptoms include agitation, panting, drooling, vomiting, tremors, and seizures. Prompt veterinary treatment with appropriate supportive care usually results in a good prognosis.

Flowers and Plants

Sago Palm: Popular in warmer climates, this outdoor and indoor plant can be extremely harmful to pets. All parts of the plant, including the fronds/leaves, nuts, and seeds are especially poisonous to dogs. Ingesting even a small amount can cause severe vomiting, bloody stools, damage to the stomach lining, severe liver failure and, in some cases, death. This plant

is considered one of the most deadly in dogs and long-term survival is poor; only 50% of dogs who ingest it usually survive this dangerous plant, even with veterinary treatment. Without treatment, sago palm poisoning can result in severe, irreversible liver failure. Prompt treatment is always needed for the best prognosis.

Lily of the Valley: An early springtime favorite, the Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*) contains cardiac glycosides, which are also used in many human heart medications. When eaten by dogs or cats, this common perennial can cause vomiting, diarrhea, a drop in heart rate, severe cardiac arrhythmias, and possibly seizures. Any pet with a known exposure should be examined and evaluated by a veterinarian and treated symptomatically.

Crocuses: There are two types of crocus plants: one blooms in the spring and the other in the fall. The spring plants (*Crocus spp.*) are more common and cause only gastrointestinal upset accompanied by vomiting and diarrhea in dogs and cats. However, the fall crocus (Meadow Saffron or *Colchicum autumnale*) is highly toxic and can cause severe vomiting, gastrointestinal bleeding, and multi-system organ failure with bone

marrow suppression. Symptoms may be seen immediately but can be delayed for days. If you witness your pet eating a crocus and you are not sure what variety it is, seek veterinary care immediately.

Lilies: Cat owners, beware of lilies! While some types, such as the Peace (*Spathiphyllum spp.*), Peruvian (*Alstroemeria spp.*) and Calla (*Zantedeschia spp.*), cause only minor symptoms when eaten, other varieties of the true lily family (*Lilium* and *Hemerocallis* species) are deadly and highly toxic to cats, including Tiger, Asiatic, Easter, Japanese Show, and Day lilies. Ingesting very small amounts – eating as little as two petals or leaves, or exposure to the pollen – can result in severe kidney failure. Even the water in a vase containing true lilies is considered highly poisonous, as the toxin in the plant is water-soluble. If a cat consumes any part of these lilies, s/he

needs immediate veterinary care to prevent kidney failure.

Pet Poison Helpline's new iPhone application contains an extensive database of plants, chemicals, foods, and drugs that are poisonous to pets. Full-color photos help to identify poisonous plants, and a powerful indexing feature allows users to search for toxins. See the sidebar below for more information.

While enjoying the beautiful gardens and flowers this spring and summer, have the knowledge to keep your pets safe. If, however, you think a pet may have ingested something harmful, take action immediately. Contact your veterinarian or Pet Poison Helpline at 1-800-213-6680.

Editor's Note: This article was posted May 7, 2012, on the Pet Poison Helpline website and is reprinted with permission. View the original story at www.petpoisonhelpline.com/2012/05/protecting-pets-from-poisons-in-the-yard-and-garden/.

About Pet Poison Helpline

Pet Poison Helpline, a division of SafetyCall International, is an animal poison control service based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, available 24 hours, seven days a week for pet owners and veterinary professionals who require assistance treating a potentially poisoned pet. As the most cost-effective option for animal poison control care, Pet Poison Helpline's fee of \$39 per incident includes unlimited follow-up consultations for that exposure. Pet Poison Helpline is available in North America by calling 800-213-6680. Additional information can be found online at www.petpoisonhelpline.com.



This article was posted in the April 25, 2012, issue of AnnArbor.com, and is reprinted with permission. View the original article at www.annarbor.com/pets/app-iphone-ipad-pet-poison-cat-dog-smartphone/.



New smartphone app can be helpful in saving the life of your pet in a poisoning

By Lorrie Shaw

These days, the ubiquitous smartphone keeps us connected and can help us get the information that we need quickly. In my business, a smartphone is a crucial tool in caring for animals, from being able to text, email, or call clients to give daily updates, to verifying schedule changes and, most importantly, getting in touch immediately should an emergency happen.

I've mused about how we can put our smartphones to work as an effective tool helping with a sometimes difficult task by capturing a pet's behavioral changes, lameness, or symptoms that you can't quite explain or that mysteriously disappear when you step foot into the veterinarian's office.

Handheld devices just

became even more useful: A new app designed with your pet's welfare in mind was released in late March and could mean the difference between life and death for your animal companion.

Apple has made Pet Poison Help available for download and does two things: it offers information on hundreds of searchable household products and plants that have the propensity to be toxic to your critter, as well as guiding you through steps to take if your dog or cat is exposed to something that can harm them, with direct dialing to the Pet Poison Helpline. The helpline is staffed by board-certified veterinary internal medicine and emergency critical care specialists and veterinary toxicologists.

The app, which costs 99 cents to download and is compatible with iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad, is no substitute for a trip to your vet's office or an emergency vet should something happen, but it can help get the ball rolling. The professionals staffing the helpline have special training to assist you and your own vet or emergency vet hospital (by dialoging directly with them) if your pet is critically ill from a potential poisoning.

To download Pet Poison Help, go to <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/pet-poison-help/id512694876?mt=8>.

Uh-Oh. Looks like I shouldn't have eaten that...

