

Sumptuous but Poisonous – Don't Let Your Pet Find Her Way Into Trouble This Spring

Dogs are indiscriminate eaters, and can easily find their way into these edible toxins during the outdoor season. These top 10 offenders can cause adverse events from liver failure to coma and even death — some with as little as two or three petals or leaves. Are they in your yard or garden?

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- With summer outdoor fun right around the corner, it's a good time to assess how safe your yard is for four-legged family members
- Studies have linked lawn chemicals to two types of canine cancer, so this may be a good time to consider transitioning to an organic lawn using natural organic fertilizers
- It's also important to review the plants in your yard to insure none of them are toxic to pets
- Other things you can do to keep your pet safe in your yard include mowing the grass frequently to prevent flea and tick infestations, and eliminating standing water that may attract bacteria or pests

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Spring has sprung, summer is right around the corner, and many of you are looking forward to spending time outdoors with furry family members. And there's nothing quite as inviting as a lush green open space on a warm, sunny day — especially if you and your animal companion have been cooped up for months.

Unfortunately, often the most lush lawns and gardens in the neighborhood have been liberally treated with pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, and other chemicals that neither you nor your pet should be exposed to.

Studies Link Lawn Chemicals to Two Types of Cancer in Dogs

According to a study conducted over a six year period at the Foster Hospital for Small Animals at Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, exposure to lawn pesticides — specifically those applied by professional lawn care companies — raised the risk of canine malignant lymphoma (CML) by as much as 70%.¹

Dogs at highest risk for acquiring CML were over 50 pounds and living in homes where pesticides and herbicides were professionally applied, as well as homes where owners used lawn care products containing insect growth regulators (chemical killing agents).

Another study performed at the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences at Purdue University concluded certain garden and lawn chemicals are linked to canine bladder cancer, including common herbicides containing 2,4-

dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D), 4-chloro-2-methylphenoxypropionic acid (MCP) and/or dicamba.²

The dogs' exposure to the chemicals occurred through ingestion, inhalation, and transdermally (through the skin). Breeds with a genetic predisposition for bladder cancer, including Beagles, Scottish Terriers, Shetland Sheepdogs, West Highland White Terriers, and Wire Hair Fox Terriers are at particularly high risk.

The study showed that most of the dogs from homes using the chemicals had herbicides in their urine. Since some dogs from homes that did not use the products also had herbicides in their urine, researchers concluded the wind could carry the chemicals up to 50 feet from the site where they were applied.

We are just beginning to study the far-reaching detrimental effects of the vast numbers of environmental chemicals that negatively impact all of our health. There are hundreds of other chemicals causing cancer in pets that we simply haven't tested to "prove it's true."

Playing It Safe so Your Pet Can Stay Safe

Here are some recommendations:

- Don't apply chemical pesticides or herbicides to your yard, and if you use a lawn care service, don't allow them to use them. Also be aware that a neighbor's lawn chemicals can potentially contaminate your property and pose a risk to your pet.
- Avoid lawn care and other gardening products that contain insect growth regulators (IGRs). And be aware that the chemical pyriproxyfen, an IGR, is used in certain flea/tick spot-on treatments.
- Don't allow your pet access to any lawn unless you can confirm no pesticides or herbicides have been used.
- If you think your pet has rolled around on chemically treated grass, bathe her as soon as possible. If you've walked your dog (or cat) in a grassy area that might be contaminated, giving her a foot soak as soon as you get home should flush away any chemical residue that may be clinging to her feet and lower legs.
- Increase the number of baths and foot rinses spring through fall, when chemical application is highest along public highways, parks, schools, streets and public nature preserves.
- If you live in a townhouse or community that applies chemicals to common areas, try "detoxing" a patch of grass in your backyard by watering the chemicals down into the soil to reduce skin contact after application.

Keep your pet on a leash (and on the sidewalk) until you've walked to your pesticide-free destination, and consider a periodic detoxification protocol for your pet.

Consider Transitioning Your Lawn from Fast Food to an Organic Diet

Espoma Co., a business that has been producing natural and organic products for the lawn and garden industry for 80 years, created what they call their Safe Paws campaign to help educate people about natural gardening solutions that keep pets healthy and safe outside.³

Espoma encourages homeowners to get their lawn off "fast food" and on "healthy food." The traditional method of lawn care spreads toxic pesticides over the entire lawn that are potentially harmful to pets, kids, and the environment.

Synthetic fertilizers containing fast-acting chemicals and made with fossil fuels like natural gas and coal are another

problem in conventional lawn care.

These chemicals can burn the grass and kill earthworms and beneficial organisms in the soil. Excess fertilizer can leach into nearby waterways, causing pollution and **harmful algae blooms**.

Espoma explains that the focus of organic lawn care is to produce a healthy lawn and soil using natural organic fertilizers. An organic lawn has grass roots grown deep into the soil, which makes them less vulnerable to drought, weeds, insects, disease, and other stressors.

There are many excellent online resources about how to naturally control weeds and improve soil health, and in many communities organic lawn care services are readily available.

Plants That Are Toxic to Pets

Another way your four-legged family member can get into trouble outdoors in warm weather is if she decides to sample a potentially toxic plant growing in your yard or a neighbor's.

Fortunately, while there are thousands of species of plants and flowers, only a few are truly dangerous and poisonous to your pet. Since it's important to know which plants are most deadly for your dog or cat, the Pet Poison Helpline has compiled a list of the top 10 offenders.⁴

- **Autumn Crocus** — The Autumn Crocus is highly toxic and can cause severe vomiting, GI bleeding, liver and kidney damage, and respiratory failure.
- **Oleander** — Oleander leaves and flowers are extremely toxic if ingested and can cause severe vomiting, slow heart rate and may even cause death.
- **Azalea** — Eating even a few azalea leaves can result in vomiting, diarrhea and excessive drooling; without immediate veterinary attention, the pet could fall into a coma and possibly die.
- **Dieffenbachia** — Dieffenbachia can cause intense oral irritation, drooling, nausea, vomiting and difficulty swallowing if ingested.
- **Cyclamen** — The roots of this seasonal flowering plant are especially dangerous to pets. If ingested, cyclamen can cause severe vomiting and even death.
- **Daffodils** — Ingestion of the bulb, plant or flower can cause severe vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and even possible cardiac arrhythmias or respiratory depression.
- **Kalanchoe** — This popular flowering succulent plant can cause vomiting, diarrhea and heart arrhythmias if ingested by pets.
- **Lily of the Valley** — Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, drop in heart rate, severe cardiac arrhythmias, and possibly seizures.
- **Lilies** — The more dangerous, potentially fatal lilies are true lilies, including Tiger, Day, Asiatic, Easter and Japanese Show lilies – all of which are highly toxic to cats.

Even small ingestions (such as 2-3 petals or leaves) can result in severe kidney failure.

- **Sago Palm** — If ingested, the leaves and seeds can cause vomiting, bloody stools, damage to the stomach lining, severe liver failure and, in some cases, death.

When purchasing nontoxic annuals or perennial plants from nurseries, check the tags to make sure they have not been sprayed with neonicotinoids, which are devastating to bee populations.

Additional Suggestions for a Pet-Safe Yard

John Harrison, sales and marketing manager for the Espoma Co., suggests pet guardians, "Look at the totality of the garden or landscape. There are a number of situations that can be changed to make yards more hospitable to pets."⁵

For example:

- Food and garden waste can enhance the quality of garden soil, but remember to keep compost in closed containers, because decomposing waste can make pets sick if ingested
- Mow grass frequently and maintain it at 3 to 3.5 inches to keep flea and tick populations under control
- Eliminate standing water that could harbor bacteria, parasites, worms and mosquitoes
- Store hazardous materials such as insecticides, paint, car parts, and gasoline in a safe place

Sources and References

[mySA May 19, 2015](#)

¹ [Environmental Research, Volume 112, January 2012, Pages 171-176](#)

² [Science of the Total Environment, July 2013, pp 456-457](#)

³ [Espoma Safe Paws Lawn](#)

⁴ [Pet Poison Helpline](#)

⁵ [AZCentral, May 19, 2015](#)
