

# The Garden Threat That Few Pet Owners Know About

If you have a garden or flowers in your yard, this is something you need to know about. If your pet got ahold of one, it could lead to vomiting and diarrhea.

Reviewed by **Bark & Whiskers**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In 2015, nearly 5% of the calls made to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (ASPCA) Poison Control Center were due to indoor and outdoor plants
- English shamrock, kalanchoe and elephant's ears are examples of common houseplants that may poison dogs and cats
- Outdoors, sago palm, lilies, foxglove and blue-green algae pose significant toxicity risks to pets
- If you bring spring flower bulbs (daffodils, hyacinth, tulips, etc.) into your home (or plant them in your yard), keep a close eye to be sure your pet leaves them alone
- If your pet eats a plant that you suspect may be poisonous, don't wait. It can be difficult to distinguish poisonous varieties from nontoxic plants, and waiting could be the difference between life and death for your pet

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A persistent and motivated dog or cat can get into virtually anything — a closed cabinet, a garbage can, your closet or your purse, for instance. Some pet owners learn this the hard way, after a pet chews up a favorite shirt or, worse, gets sick from ingesting something toxic.

**Pet-proofing your home** is absolutely imperative if you have pets. The lengths you go to should depend on your pet's age (puppies and kittens are apt to chew and nibble with reckless abandon) and temperament, but there are some poisons that you need to be aware of, regardless — i.e., plants.

Many seemingly innocuous plants can be deadly to pets, and plants can be attractive to cats and dogs looking to sample them for a treat or due to boredom.

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## Top 5 Poisonous Indoor Plants

1. **Araceae plant family (Insoluble calcium oxalates)** — Many popular houseplants contain insoluble calcium oxalates, which are toxic to dogs and cats. The crystals cause severe mouth pain, irritation and

burning, which may cause your pet to drool or paw at her mouth.

Vomiting may also be seen. Offering milk or yogurt to your pet may help to lessen symptoms, but if your pet continues to show signs of pain, seek veterinary help. Examples of plants that contain insoluble calcium oxalates include:

- Caladium, also known as malanga, elephant's ears, stoplight, mother-in-law plant, Texas wonder, angel wings and pink cloud
  - Dumbcane, also known as charming dieffenbachia, tropic snow and exotica
  - Peace lily, calla lily, sweetheart vine, devil's ivy, umbrella plant and arrowhead vine
2. **English shamrock (Soluble calcium oxalates)** — Soluble calcium oxalates, which are also found in rhubarb leaves and tropical star fruit, can lead to low calcium concentrations that can be deadly. Ingestion may also lead to the formation of calcium oxalate crystals in the kidneys, lead to kidney damage.

Symptoms of poisoning include drooling, loss of appetite, vomiting, tremors, lethargy and abnormal urination.

3. **Kalanchoe (Cardiac glycosides)** — This houseplant's succulent leaves and bright flowers make them popular gifts, but they contain cardiac glycosides that are poisonous to dogs and cats.

Consuming this plant can lead to cardiac arrhythmias, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, heart failure, electrolyte abnormalities, seizures, tremors and death.

4. **Corn plant/dragon tree (Saponins)** — Ingesting this plant may lead to vomiting, drooling and diarrhea, along with lethargy and dilated pupils. Symptoms are typically minor, but if your pet seems uncomfortable or you're not sure what type of plant she consumed, seek veterinary care.
5. **Spring flower bulbs** — While the flowers and leaves of popular spring flowers (that are often brought into the house in the spring) are generally nontoxic, consuming the bulb can lead to vomiting and diarrhea.

Consuming larger amounts of the bulbs may lead to a foreign body obstruction and, rarely, low blood pressure, tremors and seizures.

If you bring spring flower bulbs (daffodils, hyacinth, tulips, etc.) into your home (or plant them in your yard), keep a close eye to be sure your pet leaves them alone.

## Top 4 Poisonous Outdoor Plants

1. **Sago palm (Cyasin)** — This popular plant, also known as coontie palm, cardboard palm, cycads and zamias contain toxic cyasin.

It's toxic to dogs, cats and horses and may lead to symptoms including vomiting, jaundice, hemorrhagic gastroenteritis, bruising, seizures, coma, liver damage, liver failure and death.

Just one or two seeds are enough to cause poisoning and may be deadly in dogs without immediate treatment. Sago palms are popular outdoors in the southern U.S. and may also be found as houseplants.

2. **Lilies** — Lilies are highly toxic to cats. This includes many varieties, including day lilies, Easter lilies, tiger lilies, Asiatic lilies and more.

Consuming small amounts of any part of this plant, including just two or three leaves or petals or even water from a vase of the flowers, can lead to death from kidney failure in cats.

Symptoms include vomiting, loss of appetite, lethargy, diarrhea, depression, kidney failure and death.

Aggressive treatment including decontamination (inducing vomiting) and fluid diuresis may save your cat's life, so seek emergency veterinary care immediately.

3. **Foxglove (Cardiac glycosides)** — Foxglove contains cardiac glycosides that are toxic to dogs, cats and horses. Consuming this plant can lead to cardiac arrhythmias, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, heart failure and death.

Other plants that contain cardiac glycosides include oleander, lily of the valley, dogbane and milkweed.

4. **Blue-green algae — Toxic blue-green algae** in ponds and lakes may produce harmful compounds including microcystins and anatoxins. The former, microcystins, may lead to liver damage or liver failure while anatoxins cause neurotoxicity.

This may lead to death due to respiratory paralysis. Signs and symptoms of exposure to these toxins include:<sup>1</sup>

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Blood in the stool or tarry stool
- Weakness
- Pale mucous membranes
- Jaundice
- Seizures
- Disorientation
- Coma
- Shock
- Excessive salivation
- Neurologic signs (muscle tremors, muscle rigidity and paralysis)
- Blue discoloration of the skin and mucous membranes
- Difficulty breathing

Dogs are especially at risk from blue-green algae because they may wade or swim in affected waterways. While swimming, dogs often consume a lot of water (especially if they're retrieving a toy or stick). They may also ingest the algae by licking their fur after they get out of the pond.

Even breathing in droplets of air contaminated with the algae can cause illness, so if you notice it, don't let your pets anywhere near the area.

Other animals may also be affected, including horses, cattle, sheep, goats and llamas. Although cats may also be harmed by the algae, they're not typically exposed because they rarely swim in ponds and lakes.

If your pet has come into contact with blue-green algae, rinse him with fresh water and immediately seek emergency veterinary care.

## If in Doubt, Seek Emergency Veterinary Care

If your pet eats a plant that you suspect may be poisonous, don't wait. It can be difficult to distinguish poisonous varieties from nontoxic plants, and waiting could be the difference between life and death for your pet. If you're not sure whether the plant is poisonous, it's best to seek veterinary attention just in case.

You can also consult the **ASPCA's database of toxic and nontoxic plants**, which you can search to find out if the plant your pet consumed warrants a trip to the emergency vet.

In addition, if your pet consumes a toxic plant or other poisonous substance, call your local veterinarian, emergency veterinary clinic or ASPCA's 24-hour emergency poison hotline at 1-888-426-4435 to find out what next steps to take.

Also, it's best to be proactive. If you have any poisonous plants in or outside your home in an area where your pet can access, remove them before your pet decides to take a taste.

### Sources and References

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<sup>1</sup> Pet Poison Helpline, Blue-Green Algae

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