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**PETS AND PLANTS**

**WHAT’S TOXIC AND WHAT’S NOT**

Pick up any gardening magazine today and you can feast your eyes on exquisite examples of landscape design. Ranging from the wildly romantic flower profusions of cottage gardens to the more angular and formal-hedged English gardens, these landscapes often have more in common than eye-enticing plantings. Look closely and more times than not, a four-legged “gardener’s companion” can be seen lounging on a stone path or peering out from beneath the shrubbery. Gardener’s love their pets just as much as they love their petunias! Unfortunately, every year in the United States, several hundred pets die after consuming plants that are toxic to them.

Regardless of whether a gardener’s penchant is for 100 pound Rottweilers, six pound Siamese, or a pair of cooing peach-faced love birds, knowing the potential toxicity of all their indoor and outdoor plants is vital. Numerous ornamental plants as well as some parts of commonly grown vegetables are toxic if consumed by our furry or feathered friends. Recognizing what plant might pose a toxic threat and what to do if an exposure is suspected may save your pet’s life!

Each year the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals publishes a list of the ten most common poisonous plants based on data gathered through their National Animal Poison Control hotline. Currently the top ten are marijuana, sago palm, lilies, tulip/narcissus bulbs, azalea/rhododendrons, oleander, castor bean, cyclamen, kalanchoe, and yew. This list is based on frequency of reporting, not degree of toxicity. So while marijuana is the most frequently reported toxicity, it is much less life-threatening to your pet than nibbling on castor bean, oleander, or sago palms. You can obtain more in-depth information about plant toxicities at the ASPCA website, where you can also order a free refrigerator magnet with the number for the Poison Control Center. Call 1-888-426-4435. The center is manned 24/7/365 by veterinarians especially trained to deal with toxicities. A nominal consultation fee is charged, but the quick response and accurate information they provide can mean the difference between life and death for your pet.

In the majority of cases, all parts of a toxic plant are poisonous. Such is the case with oleander. With other plants, only certain parts contain the toxic principal. Tulip bulbs are toxic, yet the flowers or stems pose no problem. There are also species differences. Dogs are the only species (at least at this time) known to exhibit toxicity to grapes and raisins. Cats are the only species susceptible to the effects of lilies (Easter lily and daylily). Age can also affect the severity of symptoms of plant toxicity. The very young and the older pet are often more critically ill and may succumb to a much smaller exposure. The overall health of the pet as well as any pre-existing health conditions such as kidney or liver disease can also influence the severity of toxicity.

Among popular local ornamentals, the oleander stands out as one of the most potentially deadly plants for your pet. All parts of the plant are poisonous, even water in which oleander has soaked! Sadly, there are many cases each year where well-intentioned gardeners have tossed oleander trimmings to neighboring horses or cattle thinking they are giving them a “green treat”. Even a relatively small consumption of the cardiac glycoside-containing leaves causes death due to abnormal heart function. Kalanchoe contains a similar toxic component as oleander, also producing heart arrhythmias and death if eaten in sufficient quantity.

Another popular and attractive plant “villain” is the sago palm. Not a true palm, all parts of this cycad are poisonous, most especially the seeds or “nuts”.  A pet that eats just one or two seeds can become seriously ill or die due to liver failure. Other plants with seeds especially toxic to pets include morning glory and moonvine, bluebonnets, datura species, jatropha species, and Texas mountain laurel. If you soak your seeds overnight to scarify them prior to planting, make sure to keep them away from your pets.

It is beyond the scope of this article to thoroughly cover all the potentially toxic plants grown locally. Pet owners are urged to discuss with their veterinarian any questions they may have concerning plants in their specific landscapes. If you know or suspect your pet has eaten a toxic plant, the first thing to do is NOT PANIC. Collect some of the plant or seed consumed and call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Poison Control Center for further advice. This is good advice even if your pet is not showing symptoms! If your pet is having seizures, losing consciousness or having difficulty breathing, get to your veterinarian or an emergency veterinary facility immediately.

Texas AgriLife Extension Service - Aransas County Office can be reached by phone at 361 790-0103 or by email at [aransas-tx@tamu.edu](https://webmail.indstate.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=38f82ec7ae984fb4a90db6953a7c2635&URL=mailto%3aaransas-tx%40tamu.edu) and is located at 611 E. Mimosa, Rockport, TX.

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