

Dangerous House Plants for Pets: What Every Pet Owner Should Know

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Pet Health Weekly Contributor: Pet Healthy Living

As a passionate pet and plant lover, it's easy to overlook the risks that certain plants can pose to our furry friends. While we may see our beloved houseplants as beautiful décor or soothing greenery, some of them carry hidden dangers. During my years working in the veterinary industry, I've seen first-hand the harmful effects that certain plants can have on pets, especially when ingested. For this week's article, I will highlight some of the most dangerous house plants that every pet owner should be aware of to ensure the safety of their pets.

1. Lilies (Genus *Lilium*)

Lilies are perhaps the most notorious flower for pet toxicity. While most houseplants can cause mild stomach upset, lilies can cause serious harm, particularly to cats. The nephrotoxic substances found in lilies can quickly damage the kidneys, leading to kidney failure and, if left untreated, death. What makes lilies especially dangerous is that it doesn't take much for our pets to ingest them, whether it's the petals, leaves, or even the toxic pollen. Cats may unknowingly ingest the pollen while grooming, which can quickly become a life-threatening situation. If you have cats in your home, it's best to avoid keeping lilies, as even a small amount can be toxic.

2. Sago Palm (*Cycas revoluta*)

This plant may look like an innocent tropical decoration, but it's incredibly toxic to both dogs and cats. All parts of the sago palm are poisonous, but the seeds (or "nuts") contain the highest level of toxins. The toxin, called cycasin, can cause severe liver damage, vomiting, diarrhea, and even death if ingested. It's crucial to keep sago palms out of reach of curious pets. If you suspect your pet has ingested any part of this plant, immediate veterinary care is essential.

3. Aloe Vera

Aloe vera is widely known for its healing properties for humans, but it's dangerous to pets. If ingested, it can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and lethargy in both dogs and cats. While aloe vera's gel is safe for topical use on humans, it contains saponins and anthraquinones that can lead to gastrointestinal upset in pets. Keep aloe vera plants high on shelves or out of reach, and be cautious about using them near your animals.

4. Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane)

Dieffenbachia, also known as dumb cane, is a popular ornamental houseplant, but it's extremely toxic to both dogs and cats. The plant contains oxalate crystals that, when chewed, can cause intense oral irritation, swelling, drooling, difficulty swallowing, and gastrointestinal upset. In severe cases, these crystals can lead to breathing difficulties or even airway obstruction. If you have pets that tend to nibble on plants, it's best to keep this one out of the house entirely.

5. Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*)

Pothos, also known as Devil's Ivy, is a hardy and low-maintenance plant, which makes it a popular choice for many plant lovers. Unfortunately, it's toxic to pets. The plant contains calcium oxalate crystals, which can irritate the mouth, throat, and stomach if ingested. Symptoms of poisoning include drooling, vomiting, and difficulty swallowing. While pothos can be an attractive addition to your home, it's a good idea to place them in locations that are not easily accessible to your pets.

6. English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

English ivy is another common indoor plant that is highly toxic to pets. It contains saponins and polyacetylene compounds that can cause gastrointestinal distress, including vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. Pets may also experience skin irritation if they come into contact with the plant. If ingested in large amounts, English ivy can lead to more severe symptoms, such as lethargy and difficulty breathing. It's important to keep this plant away from pets, especially if they are known to chew on plants.

7. Philodendron

Philodendrons are beautiful, easy-to-care-for houseplants, but they are extremely toxic to pets. Like pothos and Dieffenbachia, they contain calcium oxalate crystals, which can cause intense oral irritation, drooling, and difficulty swallowing if chewed. In severe cases, pets can experience swelling of the throat, leading to breathing difficulties. If your pet has ingested part of a philodendron, immediate veterinary attention is necessary.

8. Chrysanthemums

Chrysanthemums, or mums, are popular in fall decorations and bouquets, but they are not safe for pets. These flowers contain pyrethrins, chemicals commonly used in insecticides, which can cause vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, and even lethargy in dogs and cats. While the toxicity level is generally lower compared to some of the other plants on this list, it's still important to be cautious. If your pet shows any symptoms of poisoning after exposure to chrysanthemums, contact your vet right away.

Final Thoughts

As a pet owner, it's important to be aware of the plants in your home and their potential dangers. While plants can add beauty and tranquility to your space, certain species can pose serious risks to your pets if ingested. Always research the plants you bring into your home and ensure they are pet-safe, or keep them out of reach of curious paws. If you suspect your pet has ingested a toxic plant, don't hesitate to contact your veterinarian immediately. In many cases, quick treatment can make all the difference in ensuring your pet's safety and well-being.

Remember: when in doubt, it's better to err on the side of caution and choose plants that are safe for your pets. By staying informed, you can create a pet-friendly environment while still enjoying the beauty of nature indoors. Next week's article will be about the best houseplants for pet owners. Stay tuned!