



PLANTS VS. PETS: WHO WINS?

By Jacki Hein, CCNP

Imagine you're a dog, a young dog that loves to play. You have a big yard to romp around in, and there are those great areas with soft dirt for digging and wonderful plants to chew. Life is good - until "mom" comes running out of the house with broom in hand, and YOU are the target!

We love our pets and want to give them room to run, but we don't appreciate everything they do. As a garden center manager, I've heard horror stories from customers about dogs who literally chew up shrub roses. Ouch! Not only that, some things we grow can be harmful or poisonous to pets causing illness, or even death, if ingested. While a high fence is the only sure cure, it's best to avoid harmful plants when pets are prone to chewing.

Following is an abbreviated list of outdoor plants poisonous to our pets:

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	POISONOUS PARTS
Apricot	Prunus ameniaca	Stem, bark, seed pits
Azalea or Rhododendron	Rhododendron	All parts
Chokecherry	Prunus virginica	Leaves, pits, stems
Daffodil	Narcissis	Bulbs
Daphne	Daphne mezereum	Berries, bark, leaves
Foxglove	Digitalis purpurea	Leaves, seeds, flowers
Haycinth	Hyacinthus orientalis	Bulbs, leaves, flowers
Lily of the Valley	Convallaria majalis	All parts
Morning GLory	Ipomoea violaces	Seeds
Rhubarb	Rheum raponticum	Leaves
Tulip	Tulipa	Bulbs
Yew	Taxus	Needles, bark, seeds



If you've already planted a few of these items, your pets may be perfectly safe. I have a neat Rottweiler named Gretchen as well as plenty of the listed plants without a fence around either. Gretch is seven years old, though, and well past the chewing/digging puppy stage. Like people, it's the younger generations that seem to get into things!

Let me add a word or two here about mulch, too. We always recommend to our customers to incorporate compost or sphagnum peat into the soil when planting and then to layer mulch on top to help retain moisture and keep soil temperatures cooler in the hot sun. Cocoa bean mulch is advertised as being 100 percent natural and a good organic choice for the environmentally conscious gardener. Plus, we all LOVE that chocolaty smell. Yet if ingested, cocoa mulch could cause serious illness or even death in dogs. Wood mulch may cause a sliver or two for the chewer, but isn't likely to kill. On the other hand, medium to large rock mulch can hinder doggie diggers.

Also, be careful recommending Dried Blood Meal as a repellent for rabbits. Yes, it's organic and a slow release source of nitrogen for the garden, but dogs are naturally attracted to dried blood products. If they should consume it in quantity, it could have adverse health effects.

Inside the house isn't necessarily a safe place for pets who chew, either. A friend at work has a couple cats that seem to want to chew on any houseplant she brings home. Plants to be avoided include Dieffenbachia, Pothos, Philodendron, Spathiphyllum, and Schefflera. These plants contain calcium oxalate crystals in their cells that can seriously harm pets, if ingested.

Avoid thorny and spiny plants inside and out; they can cause serious eye injury.

There's good in-depth information available on the web regarding pet-friendly gardens. A few sites to try include: www.thepoop.com, www.thepetcenter.com, and www.flower-gardening-made-easy.com. A good phone number to keep on-hand for that desperate situation is 1-888-4-ANI-HELP (The Animal Poison Control Center). Your pets will thank you. Happy gardening!