



Behind closed doors: Top 5 indoor plants poisonous to dogs and cats

As spring and summer finally approach, so do the risks of dogs and cats being accidentally poisoned by potentially dangerous plants. According to the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center outdoor and indoor plants represented almost 5% of the calls to ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center in 2015. Here's what you need to know to keep your pets safe.

INSOLUBLE CALCIUM OXALATES

One of the most common plant poisonings in dogs and cats involves plants from the Araceae family.¹ These common houseplants contain insoluble calcium oxalate



crystals and typically include the *Dieffenbachia* genus of plants. Examples include philodendron, pothos, peace lily, calla lily, dumb cane, arrowhead vine, mother-in-law's tongue, sweetheart vine, devil's ivy, umbrella plant and elephant ear.

When dogs or cats chew into these plants, the insoluble crystals result in severe mouth pain. Signs of drooling, pawing at the mouth, swelling of the muzzle or lips and occasional vomiting can be seen. Thankfully, this poisonous plant—while commonly encountered—isn't too dangerous, and simply offering some milk or yogurt to your dog or cat can help minimize the injury from the insoluble calcium oxalate crystals. If signs continue or worsen, seek veterinary attention.

SOLUBLE CALCIUM OXALATES

The English shamrock is a beautiful, popular houseplant. These houseplants contain soluble oxalate-containing plants, which are very different from insoluble oxalate plants. Other examples of this type of poisonous plant include rhubarb (leaves) and the tropical star fruit.² While this is a rare cause of poisoning in dogs and cats, it can result in a life-threateningly low calcium concentration when ingested. It can also cause calcium oxalate crystals to form in the kidneys, resulting in acute kidney injury.² Clinical signs of poisoning include drooling, not eating, vomiting, lethargy, tremors (from a low calcium concentration) and abnormal urination. If your dog or cat ingests this houseplant, visit a veterinarian for blood work and intravenous fluids.





KALANCHOE

You may have purchased this common and beautiful houseplant in a supermarket or gift store. The thick succulent leaves and beautiful bunches of small flowers, which come in pink, red, yellow, and more, can be very



poisonous when ingested by cats and dogs as they contain cardiac glycosides. Signs of poisoning include gastrointestinal signs (nausea, drooling, vomiting), profound cardiovascular signs (a very slow or rapid heart rate, arrhythmias), electrolyte abnormalities (a high potassium concentration) or central nervous

system signs (dilated pupils, tremors, seizures).³ Treatment includes decontamination, if appropriate, along with intravenous fluids, heart and blood pressure monitoring, heart medications and supportive care.

CORN PLANT/DAGON TREE



This plant from the *Dracaena* species contains saponins. When ingested by dogs and cats, it can result in signs of gastroenteritis (vomiting, drooling and diarrhea), lethargy and dilated pupils. Thankfully, this plant poses a minor poisoning risk to your dog or cat, but it is still best to keep it out of reach.



SPRING FLOWERS

You might be looking for a bit of color in the house during the spring and plant spring bulbs as houseplants. Certain spring bulbs (such as daffodils, hyacinth and tulips) can result in mild vomiting or diarrhea. With massive ingestions, the bulbs can get stuck in a dog's stomach or intestines, causing a foreign body obstruction. Less commonly, with large ingestions, elevated heart and respiratory rates can occur. Rarely, low blood pressure and neurologic signs (tremors, seizures) can be seen. Thankfully, the greens and flowers are generally considered to be safe; it's the bulb itself that is the most poisonous. Spring bulb poisonings can be easily treated with decontamination, fluid therapy and anti-vomiting medication.

When in doubt, if you suspect your cat or dog got into a poisonous plant, contact the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at **888-426-4435**. You can also download their free app. While most plant ingestions in dogs and cats typically just result in mild gastrointestinal signs, some plant ingestions can be deadly without treatment and immediate attention by a veterinarian is important for best outcome.

References

1. Hovda LR, Cargill E. Oxalates – Insoluble. In: Osweiler G, Hovda L, Brutlag A, et al., eds. *Blackwell's five-minute veterinary consult clinical companion: small animal toxicology*. 1st ed. Iowa City: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010;720-729.
2. Hovda LR, Cargill E. Oxalates – Soluble. In: Osweiler G, Hovda L, Brutlag A, et al., eds. *Blackwell's five-minute veterinary consult clinical companion: small animal toxicology*. 1st ed. Iowa City: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010;730-736.
3. Cargill E, Martinson KL. Cardiac glycosides. In: Osweiler G, Hovda L, Brutlag A, et al., eds. *Blackwell's five-minute veterinary consult clinical companion: small animal toxicology*. 1st ed. Iowa City: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010;696-704.