

# Springtime Toxins: Pet Owners, Be Alert!

As flowers bloom, so do risks for pets. Learn which plants turn spring from a season of beauty into a hidden danger zone for your furry friends, and how to keep them safe from nature's toxic temptations.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Spring has sprung, and as gorgeous as the weather and bursts of color are, there are dangers lurking for pets among some of the most popular indoor and outdoor warm weather plants
- Pet parents should keep furry family members away from Easter lilies (and all lilies), cycads (palms and ferns), toxic mushrooms, and blue-green algae
- Four additional watchouts: tulips/hyacinths, daffodils, crocuses, lily of the valley plants, and fertilizers

Spring is in full, gorgeous bloom, but unfortunately, the very blooms that inspire awe can also pose a serious threat to furry family members. As a pet parent, you need to be aware of potential dangers lurking in your home and neighborhood. By being proactive and learning about common poisonous plants, you can help ensure your animal companion stays safe and healthy during the warmer months of the year.

Dr. Murl Bailey, senior professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, describes some of the most common poisonous plants pet parents should be aware of:<sup>1</sup>

- **Easter lilies — Easter lilies** (and lilies in general) contain toxins that can cause severe kidney damage in cats. Dogs can also be poisoned, but they're less likely to sample lilies than cats. Even small ingestions (e.g., chewing on a petal or drinking water from a vase containing lilies) can lead to acute kidney injury in cats. Signs of lily poisoning include loss of appetite, hiding behavior, and lethargy.

*"If owners notice a change in their cats, especially if they have lilies around the house, they should immediately take their cat to their veterinarian," says Bailey. "The veterinarian will start the cat on extensive intravenous fluid therapy to protect the kidneys, but the therapy should be given within 48 hours to be most effective."*

- **Cycads —** Cycad plants, typically referred to as palms or ferns, are seed plants commonly found in tropical and subtropical regions, both indoors and outdoors. Their roots contain a liver toxin, and both cats and dogs can be poisoned. However, dogs are more often drawn to the plants as they sniff, lick, and chew their way through life.

*"The first sign that an owner may see is blood in their pet's stool or vomit," Bailey explains. "The pet may soon develop severe bleeding, because normal clotting factors are made in the liver and when the liver quits making the clotting factors, the blood won't clot."*

Since these plants are so popular, it's important for pet parents to learn to identify them and ensure their animals don't have access to them.

- **Mushrooms** — Spring also brings mushrooms that pop up in yards, parks, and other outdoor spaces. Most are harmless, but a few species of **mushrooms can be toxic** to cats and dogs.

*"There are many mushrooms that cause different clinical signs, ranging first from vomiting and diarrhea and then to organ failure and even death," Bailey says. "There is no good specific treatment for mushroom intoxication, so the veterinarian will treat the patient for the clinical signs present."*

She advises vigilance in spotting and removing any mushrooms growing in areas accessible to your pets, especially dogs, as they are more likely to ingest significant amounts of mushrooms while exploring outdoors. If your pet ingests poisonous mushrooms, give n-acetyl cysteine (NAC) and milk thistle right away, as research shows it's very beneficial for improving outcomes of mushroom toxicosis.<sup>2</sup>

- **Blue-green algae** — During spring and summer when the weather is warm, **blue-green algae** blooms and accumulates in non-moving bodies of water such as ponds, lakes, and rivers. These blooms produce toxins that are deadly to cats and dogs.

*"The water may be clear, but because the toxins can still be present, it is best if pet owners don't let their pets swim in the water, especially in areas where the water is not moving, as this where blue-green algae can start growing," Bailey explains. "The first clinical signs, such as convulsions and collapse, develop as soon as the animals leave the water and pets can rapidly deteriorate before the owner can get them to the veterinarian."*

If your pet has been exposed to blue-green algae or shows any signs of poisoning after being near bodies of water, you should seek veterinary care immediately.

## More Toxic Springtime Plants

- **Tulips and hyacinths** — Tulips contain allergenic lactones. Lactones are derived from chemical compounds and taste a bit like whiskey. Hyacinths contain similar compounds. It's the bulbs of these two plants, not the leaves or flowers, that are toxic.

Symptoms of poisoning by one of these plants can include mouth and esophageal irritation, drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, increase in heart rate, and changes in breathing. There's no antidote if your pet is poisoned by eating a tulip or hyacinth bulb, and severe symptoms need immediate treatment.

- **Daffodils** — If your pet licks or eats any part of a daffodil — the bulb, plant, or flower — she'll ingest an alkaloid called lycorine that can irritate the tissues of her mouth and throat and cause excessive drooling.

Lycorine can also trigger a gastrointestinal response like vomiting, abdominal pain, or diarrhea. In more serious cases, heart and respiratory problems can occur. Severe symptoms such as these require immediate attention by a veterinarian.

- **Crocuses** — The type of crocus plant that blooms in the spring is a member of the Iridaceae family. Spring crocuses can cause gastrointestinal upset in your pet, typically vomiting and diarrhea.

More significant is the crocus that blooms in autumn known as the Meadow Saffron. This plant is highly poisonous to companion animals. If your dog or cat tastes a Meadow Saffron crocus, she can experience severe vomiting, gastrointestinal bleeding, liver and kidney damage, and respiratory failure. Symptoms of

toxicity from this plant can appear immediately upon ingestion up to several days later.

If your pet shows signs of poisoning by an autumn blooming crocus, take her for veterinary treatment right away, and bring along the plant if possible.

- **Lily of the valley** — Despite its name, the lily of the valley plant isn't a lily. It's actually a member of the asparagus family. Signs your dog or cat has sampled one of these plants can include vomiting, diarrhea, a drop in heart rate or severe cardiac arrhythmia, and seizures.

The substance in lilies of the valley that is toxic to your pet is called cardiac glycosides. If you think your dog or cat has ingested a lily of the valley, you should get him to your veterinarian for evaluation.

- **Fertilizers** — Believe it or not, the fertilizer you use on your plants can be just as dangerous, or more so, than the plants themselves. If you fertilize your lawn and garden in the spring, you should be aware of which types of **fertilizer compounds are potentially fatal** if swallowed by your pet.

Most fertilizers cause only mild gastrointestinal symptoms if eaten, but there are a few watchouts, including fertilizers containing blood meal, bone meal, disulfoton or another type of organophosphate, and iron.

If your pet consumes any toxic substance, go to your closest emergency vet facility or call Pet Poison Control: (888) 426-4435.

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Texas A&M University, Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Science, March 14, 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Mount Sinai Health Library, Milk Thistle](#)

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