

How to Create a Pet-Friendly Garden

A well-planned garden can look great and provide a safe, enriching space for your pet to play, explore, and relax.

Reviewed by [Dr. Arielle Walton](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A beautiful garden can also be a safe space for pets. By avoiding toxic plants, harmful chemicals, and unsafe materials, you can create a pet-friendly paradise
- Many common plants, like lilies and azaleas, are toxic to pets. Opt for safe alternatives like marigolds, basil, and pet grass to ensure a worry-free outdoor space
- Create pathways, shaded rest spots, and designated play areas to keep your pets entertained while protecting your plants from damage. Raised beds and fences add extra protection
- Mulch, fertilizers, and garden chemicals may contain harmful substances. Switch to organic fertilizers, pet-safe mulches, and natural pest control to protect your furry friend
- Regularly trimming grass, removing hazards, and checking for pests keeps your yard pet-friendly. With proper training and care, your outdoor space can be a safe haven for you and your animal companion

Spending time outside in your garden can be a peaceful and rewarding experience. If you have pets, your outdoor space is also their playground, so ensuring a safe environment is just as important as making it beautiful.

Many common plants and garden accessories can harm pets, so understanding the risks is the first step to creating a pet-friendly space. If you're not careful, your pet could accidentally ingest toxic plants, leading to serious health issues. Certain chemicals or unsafe materials can also put your pet at risk.

Designing your garden with your pet in mind ensures they can run, play, and relax without any worries. By making a few thoughtful choices, you can transform your outdoor space into a safe and enjoyable retreat for you and your furry friend.

Choosing the Right, Pet-Friendly Plants

One of the biggest dangers in any garden comes from plants that can be toxic to pets. Some of the most common flowers and shrubs found in gardens can be harmful if eaten, even in small amounts.

Plants like azaleas, lilies, sago palms, and castor beans¹ contain toxins that can cause anything from mild stomach upset to severe organ damage. If you have a cat, avoid planting lilies in your yard because they are especially dangerous.² Even a small amount of pollen or water from a vase containing lilies can be fatal to cats. For more information on plants that are toxic to pets, read these articles:

- **Springtime Toxins – Pet Owners, Be Alert!**
- **Just Sniffing This Poisonous Plant Could Be Deadly to Your Pet**
- **9 Indoor and Outdoor Plants That Can Kill Your Pet**

The good news is there are plenty of plants you can choose from that will make your outdoor garden (or even your indoor space) beautiful and safe for your pets.

If you want a pop of color, marigolds, snapdragons, and petunias are great options that will brighten up your garden while being completely safe for pets.³ If you love growing herbs, basil, rosemary, and thyme are all safe choices that you and your furry friend can enjoy.⁴ Creeping thyme and pet grass are also good options, especially if your pet enjoys nibbling on plants.⁵

Before you buy new plants, take a moment to check if they are safe for your pets. You can check different resources online, like the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) website.⁶ Your local gardening center or integrative veterinarian can also guide you in selecting safe plants for your furry friends.

Remember that some plants are nontoxic but may still pose problems for your pet. Thorny bushes, for example, can scratch or injure them as they plan around in your garden. Daffodils and tulip bulbs can be dangerous when their bulbs are dug up and chewed. If you want to keep these flowers, consider planting them in raised beds or using barriers to keep your pet from reaching them.

Designing a Pet-Safe Garden

The layout of your outdoor space also makes a big difference in how enjoyable and safe it is for your pet. By planning designated areas for different activities, you can ensure your pet has plenty of space to explore, play, and relax while protecting your plants.

One of the most important things you can do is create clear pathways in your garden. Since pets naturally follow the same routes, paving or marking these paths with soft gravel, flagstones, or mulch can keep them from trampling delicate plants.⁷

You can also set up a dedicated play area to entertain your pet. Dogs love to run and dig, so having a specific spot where they can dig can prevent them from ruining your flower beds. A small sandpit filled with buried toys or treats can keep a dog entertained for hours⁸ while also stimulating their instincts and keeping them active.

On the other hand, cats enjoy climbing, so adding a few pet-friendly climbing structures, like sturdy logs or small platforms, can give them a fun way to explore their space. Creating a comfortable place to rest is just as important as providing space to play. A shaded area with soft grass, a pet-friendly outdoor bed, or even a small shelter will let your pet relax and cool off on hot days.

Another great idea is to create a cat patio, or "catio," a safe outdoor enclosure that lets your feline friends safely access outdoors.

Boundaries are another important part of a pet-friendly garden. If you want to keep your pet away from certain areas, install low fences or hedges. Some dogs love patrolling the yard; you can leave a narrow pathway along the fence so they can explore without damaging your plants.

Other Hazards Lurking in Your Garden

While plants are a major concern, other hidden dangers can threaten your pet's health. Many garden chemicals, including fertilizers, pesticides, and weed killers, contain ingredients that are toxic to animals. If your pet walks through a freshly treated lawn and licks its paws, it could ingest harmful chemicals.

Using pet-safe alternatives is the best way to avoid these risks. Organic fertilizers like compost, worm castings, or fish-based fertilizers are great options. When controlling pests, natural options like neem oil, horticultural oils, or insecticidal soaps are safe for your pet.⁹

Mulch is another factor to consider. Cocoa mulch, from cocoa bean shells contains the same compounds that make chocolate toxic to dogs. Even small amounts can cause vomiting, tremors, or seizures. Instead, choose pet-friendly mulches like pine, cedar, or untreated wood chips.¹⁰

Water features can become hazardous if not properly maintained. Stagnant water in ponds or birdbaths can become a breeding ground for mosquitoes carrying diseases. Open pools and ponds can also be a drowning risk, especially for small pets. If you have a water feature in your garden, ensure it is secure and inaccessible to your pet. Changing birdbath water regularly and adding pet-friendly mosquito deterrents, like citronella plants, can help keep your space safe and comfortable.

Pests like fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes thrive in overgrown areas. Keeping your grass trimmed, clearing away fallen leaves, and using pet-safe pest control methods will reduce the chances of infestations. Regular flea and tick prevention treatments for your pet will also help keep them safe when spending time outdoors.¹¹

Creating a Garden That's Enjoyable for You and Your Pet

The key to a successful pet-friendly garden is regular maintenance and training. Once you have set up your space, keeping it clean and organized will help ensure it remains safe. Checking for weeds, pruning plants, and keeping pathways clear will make your garden easier to enjoy.

Making small changes over time, like adjusting plant placement or adding new pet-friendly features, will keep your garden evolving in a way that suits your pet's needs. According to an article from Rocky River Animal Hospital:

"Always prioritize the safety of your pets when designing your outdoor spaces. Each pet is unique and may require different considerations, so take the time to understand their needs and preferences."

Training your pet to respect the garden is as important as designing it well. Positive reinforcement can help your pet understand which areas are off-limits. Reward good behavior with treats, praise, or playtime to make it easier for them to maintain boundaries.

If you notice excessive scratching, sudden lethargy, or stomach issues, bring them to the vet immediately, then check your yard for potential hazards. With a little effort, your garden can be a safe and happy place for you and your pet.

Sources and References

^{1,2,7,8,9,10,11} [PennState Extension, July 5, 2023](#)

^{3,5} [Rocky River Animal Hospital, March 29, 2024](#)

⁴ [Pawprint Oxygen, May 4, 2023](#)

⁶ [ASPCA, Poisonous Plants](#)
