

# Pet-Friendly Gardening

By Diane Jarvis

When spring finally comes, many of us are eager to start landscaping projects. As I wandered through local nursery one year, I heard someone asking about “dog-proof” shrubs. Seems he had a young dog that liked to dig and was hoping to find something to repel the dog.

While there are a few plants that may be unpleasant to smell or taste, the answer to his dog problem is spending more time with his furry friend and training, training, training. I believe the more important issue is finding non-toxic plants that won't harm pets if they happen to eat them!

Even the best trained dog may occasionally dig or chew on plants. Cats will also chew on plants both inside and outside the house. Just to be on the safe side, use only non-toxic plants in and around your home and yard.

At the top of the toxic plants list are: Rhubarb (leaves), Bleeding Hearts, Lily of the Valley, Juniper (berries), Foxglove, Delphinium, Monks Hood, and most bulbs. Harmful trees include the Black Locust, Yew, and Oleander. These are mostly found outdoors, but if you have an indoor-only cat beware of dieffenbachia and philodendron which can be deadly.

Local favorites on the pet-friendly list are: Hollyhocks, Columbine, Potentilla, Honeysuckle, Barberry, Rose of Sharon, Marigolds, and Primrose. When you start your landscape project ask the folks at your favorite nursery to check the toxicity of any plant or tree for you. You can also go online to [www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants](http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants) for a list of plants that are toxic to dogs, cats, and bunnies as well as farm animals.

Always read the labels carefully on herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers; as some are quite poisonous to pets and wildlife. Last year the ASPCA Poison Control Center received 26,000 calls for help with pets ingesting these items.

Herbicides are used to kill broad-leaf weeds, crab grass and dandelions. Dogs walk across, or roll in, herbicide-treated lawns and then ingest toxic chemicals when they lick their coats or paws. A study by Purdue University showed a potential for increased incidence of bladder cancer in dogs exposed to lawns or gardens treated with herbicides and insecticides. Although the study focused on dogs that are predisposed to this type of cancer (Scottish Terriers, Shetland Sheepdogs, Wirehaired Fox Terriers, and West Highland White Terriers) the implication is one of caution for all pets.

Pesticides help us get rid of unwanted bugs. This time of year people start spraying for ants, spiders, and other creepy crawlers. Animals can breathe in these products, absorb them through their skin, or even lick or eat them outright. Keep pets away from treated areas until dry, or completely absorbed into the environment. Think about animals other than your pets – I recently had a nest of baby birds under my deck, and luckily mentioned

it to the pest control guy before he sprayed. I can put up with a few spiders until the babies fly away.

Flea and tick control products also fall into the pesticide category and are generally safe when used correctly. Follow directions regarding your pet's size and weight since over-application can be dangerous, and never use dog products on your cats or vice versa!

Other forms of pesticides are used to eliminate rats, gophers and mice. These are extremely dangerous for pets and should never be used in an area that pets can access. If you do use these products keep an eye out for dead or dying critters that a cat or dog may view as a toy or snack.

Fertilizers that don't contain herbicides or pesticides shouldn't harm birds or pets. As a rule, it's a good idea to water thoroughly after applying to help wash granules into the soil and off the grass blades. Keep pets (and children) away while fertilizing, and invite them back when the fertilizer has been watered in and the grass has dried. Fertilizers can be harmful if swallowed so use and store them safely.

Sometimes, in spite of precautions, your dog or cat may come in contact with harmful plants or products. If your animal seems listless, has increased saliva or drooling, stumbles or has muscle tremors or convulsions contact your vet immediately. Keep the number handy for the ASPCA Poison Control Center - **1-888-426-4435** – just in case. A consultation fee may apply.

With a little care you can have a beautiful yard and safe, healthy pets, so happy gardening!