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POISONOUS PLANTS

Mona S. Miller, DVM



Easter Lily istockphoto.com

Indoor holiday plants and winter/spring seasonal bulb planting can sometimes pose health threats to our dogs and cats.

In some instances, a diagnosis is easy, when the pet has been observed to chew on or ingest part of the plant, or there is obvious plant material in vomitus, or the plant pot has been disrupted. Factors that help determine what measures your veterinarian would take include the type of plant ingested, when it was eaten and what the current signs of illness are. Your vet might recommend inducing vomiting and giving a toxin-binding agent, such as activated charcoal, to decrease absorption. Other therapy is supportive care for the symptoms, usually involving fluids, stomach protectants and anti-nausea medication.

Most of the winter holiday plants cause simple gastrointestinal irritation, resulting in drooling, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. These plants in-

clude poinsettia, holly, mistletoe and most winter-planted bulbs (tulip, daffodil, iris and amaryllis). Just a note about poinsettia – while it definitely can cause illness, the toxic effects have generally been overstated.

Mushroom ingestion and toxicity is one of the most common plant poisons seen in dogs. Different species of wild mushrooms cause different symptoms; most common is the toxic effect on the liver by Amanita species. Signs include drooling, vomit and diarrhea, and occasionally neurologic weakness. This can be a very serious problem that can cause death. Treatment is aggressive supportive care with hospitalization, intravenous fluids, anti-nausea and anti-oxidant medication, and liver and kidney blood-work monitoring. The sooner treatment is started, the better the chances for full recovery. Mushroom ingestion is considered an emergency.

A plant toxicity found in cats only (interesting that it

doesn't affect dogs) is lily-induced kidney failure. The leaves and blooms of Easter, tiger, day and other Asiatic hybrid lilies are the causative plants. This is also very serious, as for mushroom toxicity, and can certainly cause death. Symptoms include vomiting (within 1-24 hours after ingestion, with progressive depression, inappetance and weakness. Kidney failure will start to occur within 12-36 hours. This is potentially treatable, with aggressive hospitalization, intravenous fluids and other support. The prognosis for recovery is poor if treatment is started more than 18 hours after ingestion. Note: if you are sending flowers to a friend who has a cat, it might be wise to ask the florist to eliminate any lilies from the bouquet.

Two excellent on-line resources regarding poisonous plants (and other animal care information) are Veterinary-Partner.com and ASPCA.org. As with any issue relating to your pet's medical care, it is best to call your veterinarian when questions arise about what your dog or cat may have eaten.

Dr. Mona S. Miller lives in Lafayette with her 4 year old son, yellow Labrador Retriever and grey cat. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.

• In the Back Y

DIGGING DEEP WITH CYNTHIA BRIAN-S

"There are no limitations to the mind except those we acknowledge; both poverty and riches are the offspring of thought."

Napoleon Hill



Cynthia Brian

The sun was shining brightly and the jonquils were blooming that January winter day so many years ago when my brothers, sisters, and I awoke to find strands of gleaming jewelry strung everywhere on the bushes and vines around the house. Barefoot, we ran outside, not believing our eyes. They had come. The Kings had arrived.

The holiday was "Twelfth Night" or "Three Wise Kings," celebrated on January 6, which is exactly twelve days after Christmas. The celebration was created to honor the Magi, who followed the Star of Bethlehem to visit Baby Jesus over two thousand years ago. Because we are Swiss-Italian and lived in the country, Mom and Dad always told us it was easier for the Three Wise Kings to park their camels outside our house than a house in the city. We had no reason not to believe them.

We loved Three Wise Kings Day because the Magi made us feel special. No one else in our school seemed to receive a nightfall visitation from these Middle Eastern monarchs. And though legend proclaims the Three Kings brought Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh, we were very pleased to receive a piece of fruit, a bit of candy, and about twenty-five cents in coins from them each year.

But this year was different. They had actually brought us jewels and riches beyond our wildest dreams. I vividly remember the sensation of utter delight when we spotted the shimmering trinkets hanging from the trees! I will never forget the utter thrill of knowing that our landscape was adorned with valuable ornaments from a land far far away.

"We're rich, we're rich!" My siblings shouted. Although we loved the fruit the Magi left us, seeing the glimmering baubles adorning our very own vines was quite magnificent. To solidify the illusion, we found camels' hoof prints and a good amount of camel dung scattered throughout the garden! To top

it all off, a note was attached to one of the bushes. The note was an announcement that it had been a great year for the Magi, so they had decided to share their wealth with us!

We couldn't wait to go to school to tell our teachers and all our friends about these extraordinary gifts. Surely others had experienced their delights! But no one else had.

In fact, our ingenious parents had created the illusion solely for us with used costume jewelry from a Goodwill store, and horse manure from our very own barn. My dad had brought out the horses to make the hoof prints, and naturally, we just knew they were camel prints. The nuns at school recall our wide-eyed awe when we retold the tale, and chose to keep our parents' secret. When we told the other children, we were met with disappointed looks. To our dismay, none of them had encountered such riches on the branches of their trees. We immediately shared our booty.

January, the month of winter sleep, offers gardeners the opportunity to dream, to plan, and to imagine. There is not much work to be done in our yards, but we can still begin to chart the days ahead so that we'll be able to share the bounty from our efforts. Curl up with a cup of tea brewed from your home grown Meyer lemon and spearmint, grab your favorite seed catalogues or garden books, and discover new water conserving cultivars for the year. Plan patio hardscapes incorporating rocks, bricks, and cobbles instead of flower beds. Prune a few budding branches from your peach or crab apple tree, put them in a vase and watch their blossoms unfurl. For a scent filled room of sweetness, cut a bouquet of narcissus to place by your bedside for a deeper tranquil rest. For kindness to our fine-feathered friends, design a "Bird Branch" on a deciduous tree or an old stump, hanging feeders and nests for those cold winter nights.

January offers us the chance for a new beginning. To your list of resolutions, include spending more time in nature drinking in the beauty all around us. Decide to compost, recycle, collect rainwater for watering, and grow your own organic vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Exercise your body, mind, and soul by digging deep. As our portfolios dwindle, we can be grateful for what we already have. Being connected with the earth reminds us that despite the turbulent economy, it is up to us to survive and thrive.

Follow your star. My wish for you is to shine in 2009. May you receive the magical gifts of the Magi every day-the love of family and friends, health for your children, the warmth of the home, the peace of the garden, and work you love. These are the true shimmering jewels of the season.

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