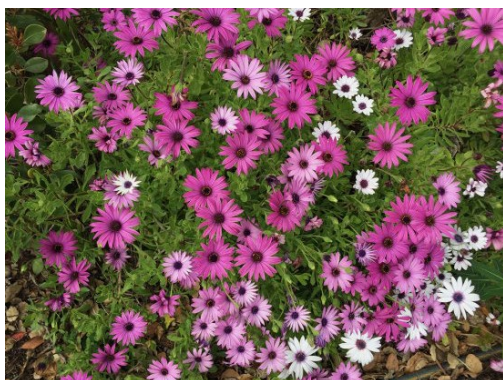


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## Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Colorful African daisies. Photos Cynthia Brian

"Flowers have an expression of countenance as much as men or animals. Some seem to smile, some have a sad expression, some are pensive and diffident, others again are plain, honest, and upright." ~ Henry Ward Beecher

And may I add . some are very poisonous!

Since I was a child growing up on a farm, I have adopted and raised every type of creature, both domesticated and wild. Dogs, cats, rabbits, squirrels, chickens, ducks, geese, cows, horses, sheep, ponies, deer, birds, pigs, goats and more roamed our barnyards. My family never allowed indoor pets, yet many of our animal friends followed us around our expansive gardens as we did our chores, sometimes nibbling on roses or gnawing on low voltage wires, but never getting sick. It seemed that our animals had an innate knowledge of what plant was poisonous and they stayed clear of the oleander, digitalis, hemlock, and hundreds of other toxic specimens.

Recently I was hired by a lovely client to provide a colorful garden design for the family's backyard.

The caveat to the project was that their sweet puppy ate anything growing. While we walked around the yard, the pooch did indeed sample everything. When I submitted my suggested planting list, I was confident that my choices would be fine with a plant-eating pet.

I was wrong. Several of my choices could have caused health issues depending on the amount consumed, potential allergies, or other matters.

In general, plants that are considered toxic or poisonous to people are poisonous to most animals. For example, although humans enjoy many types of mushrooms, there are numerous lethal mushrooms when ingested. If your pet nibbles on a mushroom in the wild, it must be treated as toxic. There have been instances where a plant that is safe for humans has been poisonous to an animal. Often, animals eat larger amounts of the plant resulting in a greater problem.

As I went back to the drawing board to research a list of non-ruinous flowers, it became apparent that contradictions and confusion reign. In one report, a specimen was listed as safe, and in another, it was listed as dangerous. It became important to investigate the Scientific name as well as the Family name. For example, 1,000 species and over 10,000 hybrids of begonia, Scientific name: *Begonia* spp., Family: Begoniaceae are toxic, while climbing begonia known as Rex Begonia, Scientific name: *Cissus dicolor*, Family: Vitaceae are fine. The health, age, and size of the pet as well as how much they devour is a factor in whether your pet will be affected. A website that is helpful as a guide for plants that are toxic to dogs is the ASPCA. Visit <https://www.aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/dogs-plant-list>.

After examining numerous sources and talking to experts, my recommendation is to check with your personal veterinarian before landscaping as your doctor knows your pet best. Many plants with no known toxicity could still cause an allergic reaction under the right conditions. The juice or sap from some plants contains oxalate crystals which are shaped like tiny needles that could result in irritation of the mouth, or in severe instances, cause swelling of the throat and breathing difficulties. Exposure to selected juice or sap could cause itching or burning dermatitis. Minor toxicity plants may not cause any symptoms or induce mild vomiting or diarrhea. Major toxicity plants could have serious effects on body organs such as the heart, liver, or kidney. Just as each human reacts individually to stimuli, so do animals. For this reason, a consultation with your veterinarian is advised.

Of course, there are other circumstances as well. Roses are considered healthy to eat for people and pets if they have not been treated with pesticides, insecticides, or other chemicals. However, a puncture wound from a thorn could cause irritation and pain in both humans and animals. Does this mean that we don't plant roses?

It's summer and tomatoes, peppers and beans fill many potagers. I've witnessed several friends' pets navigating the garden munching the ripe juicy veggies straight from the vine. The leaves of tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes contain solanine which can cause gastrointestinal distress and a slow heart rate. The beans could cause additional gas while potatoes need to be cooked before eating. Do we not plant vegetables?

What about garlic and onions? Plants in the Allium family can cause anemia in animals. Certain literature indicates that plants in this family should not be given to pets. Yet, garlic has been a medicinal food for centuries. It is rich in nutrients that boost immunity to numerous ailments. Our family feeds our animals small amounts of raw garlic as an agent to deter worms and repel ticks. Our pets are always healthy. The level of danger must be weighed by you, individually for your animals in concert with the expertise of your veterinarian.

I've always considered goats environmentally correct weed-eating and fertilizing animal machines. If you've ever witnessed hundreds of goats clearing a hillside of blackberry bushes, poison oak, and a variety of tall grasses, it's easy to believe that these ruminants can and will consume anything . and everything. Yet, there are over 700 species of plants that could cause toxicity in goats. Fortunately for them, their

internal antenna steers them away from the poisonous plants unless starvation is a factor.

This is a curated list of "safe plants for pets" culled from numerous research. With that being written, remember that you and your vet know your pet the best, so make sure to double-check that your beloved friend won't eat something harmful at home or while traveling.

- alstroemeria
- aster
- petunias
- bee balm
- orchid
- statice
- rosemary
- thyme
- pot marigolds (calendula)
- sage
- catnip
- basil
- lemon balm
- canna lilies
- camellias
- fuchsias
- lilac
- nasturtium
- magnolia bushes (need full sun, purple, pink, white)
- snapdragons
- star jasmine
- ginger lily
- viburnum
- African daisy
- cornflower (Bachelor Buttons)
- rabbit's foot fern
- sword fern
- celosia
- chervil (French parsley)
- heuchera (coral bells)
- daylilies
- Easter lilies
- gloxinia
- grape hyacinth
- baby tears (stonecrop)
- hollyhock
- ice plant
- jasmine
- crape myrtle
- mahonia (Oregon grape)
- plumbago
- rose
- scabious (pincushion flower)
- stargazer lily
- stevia
- strawberry
- sunflower
- sweet potato vine
- coreopsis
- torch lily (red hot poker)
- impatiens

Currently, my landscape is full of a stunning sea of swaying naked ladies. In the Amaryllis genus, this flowering bulb contains a variety of toxic alkaloids with the most prevalent being lycorine. Again, the lethality posed by pet ingestion is contradictory and the medical literature contains no pet-related cases reported. Fortunately, my pets are not interested in this flower, but if you have animals that are nature nibblers, exercise caution, not only in your garden but when out on walks or hikes with your animals.

Do your homework. Keep your plants and pets safe from poisoning. And in case I didn't write this enough, talk to your vet!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



Blue plumbago is eye-catching and safe for pets in the garden. Photos Cynthia Brian



Roses and snapdragons grow well together, yet roses have thorns. Photos Cynthia Brian



Sword ferns are excellent for shade gardens. Photos Cynthia Brian



Hollyhocks come in numerous colors and are hummingbird magnets. Photos Cynthia Brian



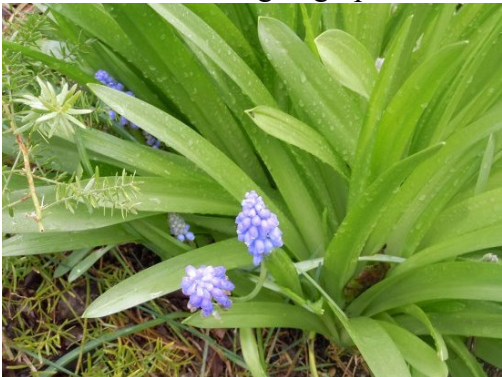
Canna of all hues adds a tropical flair.



The spectacular pink naked ladies grow in any soil condition.



Mahonia, AKA Oregon grape.



Muscari, also called grape hyacinth.



Cynthia Brian and bunny are blessed by a garden angel!

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your fall garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at [www.StarStyleRadio.com](http://www.StarStyleRadio.com). Her newest children's picture book series, Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures, will be available soon. Buy copies of her books, [www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store](http://www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store). Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD and special savings. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures.

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