

Danger Lurks for the Holidays

Forego poinsettias, breakable ornaments, tinsel and tree lights if kitty loves to climb.

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Q. My 8-to-12-week-old kitten is getting really excited about all the new holiday stuff in the house. I've heard conflicting stories about cats and poinsettias. Can you please set the record straight? Are those plants fatal to cats?

Also, what about a Christmas tree? Can anything be done to discourage my little guy from climbing up the tree?

My husband and I work full-time, which makes it impossible to monitor our kitten's behavior all the time. We'd hate to lock him in a separate room while we're out.

Also, should we be concerned about leaving sewing needles out in the open?

I would greatly appreciate some advice to help us all get through the holidays safely.

A. I am glad that you are aware of potential holiday hazards and willing to take precautions. Organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) have an abundance of information regarding these problems.

Poinsettias are not good for cats. The main problem is gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines) irritation, so you may see vomiting and diarrhea if your kitten samples a poinsettia.

Check the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) for a list of other toxic plants of which to beware.

Having had many cats over the years (my two old kitty kids at 19 and 20 years of age showed no interest in the tree this year), the best advice I can give you is to anchor the tree to a sturdy hook in the ceiling, as well as crosstie it to the wall, don't hang any ornaments that are dangerous or breakable, forgo the lights, tinsel and ribbon (definite no-nos for cat owners anyway) and let your new cat enjoy Christmas and the tree.

Needles are dangerous, and gastrointestinal irritants. Keep small, sharp and hazardous items out of Kitty's reach.