

Tips to Make Your Yard Safe for Your Cat

Banfield Pet Hospital gives guidelines to protect pets.

April is National Pet Safety Month, and Portland, Oregon-based Banfield Pet Hospital offers tips for preventing and managing unforeseen yard accidents involving pets.

According to Banfield's database, which contains more than 20 million pet records from over 500 hospitals nationwide, toxic pest control products, poisonous mushrooms and snake bites are the top hazards in the yard.

Toxic Products: Using and storing toxic pest control and gardening products in and around the home increase a pet's risk of exposure. Pets typically come into contact with these substances through ingestion when a pest control product container is left within a pet's reach. Slug bait and rodent poisons are particularly dangerous, because the sweet taste entices pets, and even small quantities can be deadly.

Signs that a pet has ingested these poisons include tremors, seizures, lethargy, coma and a rapid fever spike. Fertilizers can cause irritation of the eyes, mouth and gastrointestinal tract. Some fertilizers can have herbicides and/or pesticides as additional ingredients.

If you suspect your pet has come into contact with toxic chemicals, call your veterinarian immediately and bring the product container to the veterinarian to help quicken treatment.

To prevent your pet from toxic substance poisoning:

Ask your local nursery for eco-friendly gardening products, Follow application instructions carefully, Wait at least 24 hours before allowing pets in treated areas, Seal containers tightly and store them in a secure place.

Poisonous Plants: There are a variety of poisonous plants and flowers that are dangerous to curious pets, but mushrooms are the most commonly ingested organic material in the yard.

Symptoms of mushroom poisoning in pets include diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal pain. More serious signs of fungal poisoning are coma and seizure. If you think your pet has eaten mushrooms, call your veterinarian for immediate first aid instructions. If possible, bring a sample of what the pet consumed to your veterinarian.

Of the 70,000 species of mushrooms, only 250 are considered edible, so don't take any chances. To prevent mushroom poisoning:

Remove all mushrooms you find in the yard. Check your yard frequently, because mushrooms can grow quickly even overnight.

Snake Bites: Curious pets and snakes don't mix well. In some areas of the country, a meeting of the two species can result in a venomous bite to your pet. Although it's difficult to see fang marks hidden in fur, other signs your pet has been bitten include skin swelling, bruising, pain, shock, stopped breathing or neurological twitching and drooling.

As with any potentially life-threatening emergency, if your pet appears to be bitten, call a veterinarian for instructions and take your pet immediately to a pet hospital. Do not cut open the wound nor attempt to suck out the venom. Do not put ice or a tourniquet on the wounded area.

To prevent snake bites:

Find out what poisonous snakes, if any, are in your area and learn to identify them, Make the yard unattractive to snakes by getting rid of board piles, debris or trash piles, high grass and weedy areas. Control rats and mice to reduce snakes' food supply and make the area less attractive to them. For more information, visit <http://www.banfield.net>. Posted: April 13, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST