

Deck The Halls, But Do It Safely

Pet Poison-Prevention Tips For the Holiday Season

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There are few things better than gathering with friends and family for the holidays. But while enjoying this time of year, it's important to remember the potential hazards that certain goodies and décor can pose to furry animals. To keep pets happy and healthy during the holiday season, The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center is offering cat owners the following tips:

Holiday sweets with chocolate are not for pets. Depending on the dose ingested, chocolate can be potentially poisonous to many animals. In general, the less sweet the chocolate is, the more toxic it could be.

Keep your pet on its normal diet. Any change of diet, even for one meal, may give your cat severe indigestion and diarrhea. This is particularly true for older animals that have more delicate digestive systems and nutritional requirements.

Candies and gum containing large amounts of the sweetener xylitol can also be toxic to cats. Ingesting significant quantities can produce a fairly sudden drop in blood sugar, resulting in depression, lack of coordination and seizures.

Keep aluminum foil and cellophane candy wrappers away from kittens and cats. They can cause vomiting and intestinal blockage, if swallowed.

Be careful with holiday floral arrangements. Lilies are commonly used this time of year, and all varieties of the flower can cause kidney failure in cats when ingested. Artificial flowers made from silk or plastic are a safe alternative.

Common Yuletide plants, such as mistletoe and holly berries, can be potentially toxic to pets. If a cat eats mistletoe, it could possibly suffer gastrointestinal upsets and cardiovascular problems. Holly can cause vomiting, nausea, diarrhea and lethargy, if ingested. Poinsettias are considered to be very low in toxicity but could cause mild vomiting or nausea, if ingested by cats.

Keep pets away from Christmas tree water. The water may contain fertilizers that, if ingested, can cause a stomach upset. Stagnant tree water can also act as a breeding ground for bacteria, and a pet could end up with nausea and diarrhea if it is ingested.

Consider decorating your tree with ornaments that are relatively less enticing to pets, such as dried non-toxic flowers, wood, fabric or pinecones. Traditional decorations such as ribbons or tinsel, if ingested, can become lodged in the intestines and cause obstruction. This is a common problem with cats, the Animal Poison Control center says.