

Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association
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# Green Lawns, Beautiful Blooms and Animal Safety!

The Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association (WVMA) reminds pet owners that spring's emergence brings with it certain risks to your pet's health. Make spring gardening, lawn care and cleaning enjoyable for you and your pet by following these tips:

#### Lawn fertilizers

Lawn fertilizers are very toxic to animals. Securely store fertilizers in an area away from your pets' reach. After applying fertilizers to your lawn, follow manufacturer instructions on how long pets and humans should avoid contact with the lawn. If you see a sign posted on a lawn that tells you to "keep off", abide by it.

#### Pesticides, insecticides and herbicides

These chemicals can be toxic to your pets and when they're not lethal, have the potential to cause long-term health concerns. If your pet is exposed, wash all affected areas with soap and water immediately, and call your veterinarian.

Like fertilizer, insecticide baits, sprays and granules are often necessary to keep our gardens healthy, but their ingredients aren't meant for four-legged consumption, so use with caution. Animal owners should be aware that the same properties of common rat and mouse poisons that make them irresistible to unwanted rodents will also attract your pet. If consumed, these can be fatal. Securely store pesticides, insecticides and herbicides from pets and read the manufacturer's label carefully for proper usage and storage.

# Mulch

Many gardeners use cocoa bean shells, a by-product of chocolate production, in landscaping. However, this appealing mulch, with its sweet smell and chocolate taste can create problems for dogs. Depending on the amount ingested, cocoa mulch can cause a range of clinical signs, from vomiting, diarrhea and muscle tremors to elevated heart rate, hyperactivity and even seizures. Use a less-toxic alternative, such as shredded pine, cedar or hemlock bark, but always supervise curious canines in yards where mulch is spread.

#### **Poisonous Plants**

When designing and planting your flower beds and gardens, keep your pet in mind. Several popular outdoor plants—including sago palm, rhododendron and azalea—are toxic to cats and dogs. Rhubarb makes a fine pie and it's a staple in many vegetable gardens, but the leaves are poisonous and can cause kidney failure. Want to know if a plant is poisonous? Look it up on Cornell University's online Poisonous Plant Index www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html.

## Cleaning products

Spring cleaning is an annual tradition in many households, but make sure the cleaning products don't cause harm to your animals. If the label states "keep pets and children away from area until dry," follow those instructions carefully, and store all chemicals out of the reach of animals.

### Paint and paint thinners

Putting a fresh coat of paint on the house? Keep the animals away! Paint thinners, mineral spirits and other solvents can cause severe irritation or chemical burns if swallowed or even if they come in contact with your pet's skin. Latex house paints typically produce a minor stomach upset, but some specialty paints may contain heavy metals or volatile substances that could be harmful if inhaled or ingested.

#### Fleas and ticks

They are tiny, little more than a pinhead in some instances, but they grow and spread quickly once they find a host. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) animal owners should administer preventive flea and/or tick products as soon after birth as possible (consistent with label claims) for the life of the pet. However, because substantial geographic differences occur in flea prevalence and seasonality, prevention programs should be tailored to needs of the individual pet and discussed with a veterinarian. Read and follow all label directions of all flea and tick products.

#### **Preventive medications**

According to the CDC Companion Animal Parasite Council, monthly broad-spectrum preventive medications with efficacy against heartworm, intestinal parasites, and fleas and ticks should be given year-round to keep your pet and your family members safe. Intestinal parasites can be transmitted even in the cold months and can be contagious to family members. If your pet's preventive medications were discontinued during the cold months, this is the time to begin them again.

Contact your local WVMA-member veterinarian if you suspect or know your animal has ingested or come in contact with a toxic substance. For other questions and concerns about springtime hazards for animals, find a WVMA-member veterinarian by visiting the WVMA website, www.wvma.org.

The mission of the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association is to advocate and promote veterinary medicine, while enriching animal and human health. Founded in 1915, The Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association has more than 2,500 members.

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