

Potentially poisonous foods and plants for pets

By Arthur O. Tucker

I have nine books on my shelf on herbs for pets. Except for one, all the others ignore the potential problem of poisonous foods and plants for pets. Do the authors assume that just because it's natural, well then it's OK?

In 2010, the Animal Poison Control Center of the ASPCA (<http://www.aspc.org/Pet-care/poison-control.aspx>) listed the top ten pet toxins fielded from 167,000 phone calls: (1) human medications, (2) insecticides, (3) rodenticides, (4) people food, (5) veterinary medications, (6) chocolate, (7) household toxins, (8) plants, (9) herbicides, and (10) outdoor toxins. Most of these, such as the medications and pesticides, I would have expected to see listed, and I had casually heard about the danger of chocolate for dogs, but the list of foods and plants surprised me.

According to the ASPCA, grapes and raisins can cause kidney failure in dogs, and onions and garlic can cause anemia if consumed in excess. Xylitol, a sugar alcohol used to sweeten human food such as sugar-free gum and mints, can cause low blood sugar and liver failure in dogs. Chocolate, especially dark chocolate, can cause agitation, vomiting, diarrhea, high heart rate, muscle tremors, and even death in pets.

There are number of plants that I already

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knew were very toxic to both humans and pets, such as the poison-hemlocks (*Conium maculatum* and *Cicuta maculata*) and white snakeroot (*Eupatorium rugosum*).

However, the ASPCA particularly lists marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*), sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*), peace lily (*Spathiphyllum*) and philodendron (*Philodendron spp.*) for the top plant poisoning calls. Other plants with potential risks to pets, according to the ASPCA, include: common cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*), hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), elephant ears (*Caladium spp.*), crown vetch (*Coronilla varia*), bleeding heart (*Dicentra spp.*), and oleander (*Nerium oleander*). Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) can be an irritant and may make your pet vomit and have head tremors.

Elderberry (*Sambucus spp.*) is toxic to both humans and pets in any raw part (elderberry jam, etc. is consumed after cooking, which renders the poisons inactive).

If you suspect poisoning of your pet, immediately call your vet. Depending upon the poison and/or symptoms, your vet should be able to suggest the most appropriate remedy. The ASPCA also provides



Submitted photo

Common philodendron, chocolate, and oleander are among the potential toxins for pets lurking in our houses.

some guidance on their website.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications,

locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.