

# HOUSEPLANTS, ANIMALS & CHILDREN

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## **Please don't eat the daisies – or the rhodies or ivys**

Houseplants are great – they are quiet, generally stay where they are placed, and usually need little more than water and food, with occasional repotting as they grow. Healthy indoor plants bring a bit of the garden indoors. They are especially welcome in the cold, dimly lit months of winter.

Human children and companion animals are also found indoors, but these require much more attention. I am a Master Gardener, not a veterinarian or child psychologist, so don't ask me about parenting or dog obedience. As for cats, as the saying goes, 'dogs have masters, cats have staff.' I serve two felines, who graciously allow me to take time from their care to write. "Oh, Benji, your water dish isn't full?" Excuse me, I'll be right back.

Where were we? Oh yes, houseplants. When cats, kids, dogs and houseplants are in the same room, accidents may result. Plants spilling over the sides of containers are attractive, but also attract attention. Children can grab a plant, pulling it off a shelf and onto their heads. Make sure all plants are out of children's reach, especially those with dangling vines (like a Spider plant) or appealing colors (such as a Purple Passion plant.)

## **PLANTS AND ANIMALS**

Make sure plants are also beyond reach of your companion animals. This is harder with cats, whose expertise in scaling shelves and furniture is legendary. Many plants can harm animals. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals website lists lilies and other plants toxic to animals. (See Resources.)

Many cats want to chew the houseplants. Luckily, most cats love to eat wheatgrass instead. This healthy snack can distract them from munching the other greenery. You can easily grow this treat. Take a container with a drainage hole, fill with potting soil (without fertilizer or other additives.) Get raw wheatberries in the bulk food section. To hasten germination, soak seeds in water for six hours. Sprinkle seeds on the soil, it's not necessary to cover them. Set container in a sunny area, water daily to keep the soil moist. Let the plants get at least three inches tall before presenting to your cat. You can also clip some of the greens for yourself – just add water, blend to liquefy, and you have wheatgrass juice. To share it with your kids, slip some into a fruit smoothie.

Do an inventory of your houseplants to learn what is safe and what should never be eaten by anyone. For the latter, either move them, give them to someone who lives alone or add it to the compost. If you're not sure what's growing in the pots around your house, check your local library for an illustrated book on houseplants or look up 'Interiorscape Plants PicturePages' from Texas A & M University Extension at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/interiorscape/>

By learning what's toxic and what's not, you can decide what's welcome in your home. Then everyone can enjoy the houseplants safely.

## NON-POISONOUS PLANTS: HUMANS

Plants listed below are considered safe and not poisonous to humans. Eating or touching these plants is unlikely to cause illness, but any plant may cause a reaction in sensitive individuals.

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Latin Name</u>
African Daisy	Dimorphotheca aurantiaca
African Violet	Saintpaulia ionantha
Aluminum Plant	Pilea spp.
Baby's tears	Soleiria soleirolii
Bamboo, Golden	Phyllostachys aurea
Bird's Nest Fern	Asplenium nidus
Boston Fern	Nephrolepis exaltata
Camellia	Camellia sinensis
Cast Iron Plant	Aspidistra elatior
Christmas cactus	Schlumbergera bridgesii
Coleus	Coleus hybridus
Corn Plant	Draceana spp.
Donkey's Tail	Sedum morganianum
Dracaena	Dracaena spp.
Echeveria	Echeveria spp.
Figs, Weeping and Fiddleleaf**	Ficus spp.
Geraniums	Pelargonium spp.
Impatiens	Impatiens wallerana
Jade Plant	Crassula argentea
Kalanchoe	Kalanchoe spp.
Lipstick Plant	Aeschynanthus spp
Maidenhair Fern	Adiantum spp.
Nerve Plant	Fittonia spp.
Orchids: Cattleya, Epidendrum, Oncidium, Paphiopedilum spp.	
Norfolk Island Pine	Araucaria heterophylla
Palms	Most are nontoxic except fishtail palm, Caryota spp
Peperomia	Peperomia spp.
Piggyback Plant * *	Tolmiea mensziesii
Poinsettia **	Euphorbia pulcherrima
Prayer Plant	Maranta leuconeura
Purple Passion Plant	Gynura aurantiaca
Sensitive Plant	Mimosa pudica
Spider Plant	Chlorophytum comosum
Swedish Ivy	Plectranthus spp.
Wandering Jew **	Tradescantia spp.
Wax Plant	Hoya carmosa
Zebra Plant	Aphelandra squarrosa

\*\*Sap may be irritating.

## POISONOUS PLANTS: HUMANS

The biggest danger posed by indoor plants is poisoning if the plant is eaten. This list includes some houseplants and others commonly found in gardens. All are considered toxic to humans, according to the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service. Eating any of these plants may cause symptoms ranging from a mild stomachache to serious heart and kidney problems.

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Latin Name</b>
Amaryllis	Hippeastrum spp.
Anthurium	Anthurium spp.
Azaleas	Rhododendron spp
Caladium	Caladium bicolor
Calla Lily	Calla palustris
Colchicum	Colchicum autumnale
Daffodil	Narcissus spp.
Dumb Cane	Dieffenbachia spp.
Elephant's Ear	Colocasia antiquorum
English Ivy [invasive]	Hedera helix
Fishtail Palm	Caryota spp.
Holly Berries	Ilex spp.
Hyacinth	Hyacinthus orientalis
Jerusalem Cherry	Solanum pseudocapsicum
Lantana	Lantana camara
Mistletoe	Phoradendron villosum
Mountain laurel (holiday greens)	Kalmia spp.
Oleander	Nerium oleander
Philodendron	Philodendron spp.
Ranunculus	Ranunculus spp.
Rosary Pea	Abrus precatorius
Schefflera	Schefflera actinophylla
Spathiphyllum	Spathiphyllum spp.
Yew (holiday greens)	Taxus spp.

**Poison Center National Hotline:** 1-800-222-1222, free. They can tell you if a plant is poisonous and what symptoms might be expected. You need to give them the identity of the plant.

**Animal Poison Control Center:** 1-888-426-4435. A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card. Online: [www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/](http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/)

## POISONOUS PLANTS: PETS

This is a partial list of common houseplants that can harm your pets. If the leaves of these plants are ingested, they may cause your pet to behave abnormally and/or vomit. Some plants considered non-toxic may cause an allergic reaction in your pet.

Aloe (Aloe vera)  
Arrowhead vine or Nephthytis (*Syngonium podophyllum*)  
Asparagus fern (*asparagus sprengeri*)  
Azalea (*Rhododendron* spp.)  
Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*)  
Caladium (*Caladium hortulanum*)  
Corn plant (*Dracaena fragrans massangeana*)  
Cyclamen (*Cyclamen* spp.)  
Dracaena (*Dracaena marginata*)  
Dumb cane (*Diefenbachia* spp.)  
Elephant's ear (*Colocasia esculenta*)  
Lilies (*Lilium* spp.)  
Peace lily (*Spathiphyllum* spp.)  
Philodendron (*Philodendron* spp.)  
Plumosa fern (*Asparagus plumosa*)  
Pothos (*Scindapsus* spp.)  
Umbrella plant or Schefflera (*Brassaia actinophylla*)

- Courtesy Iowa State University Extension

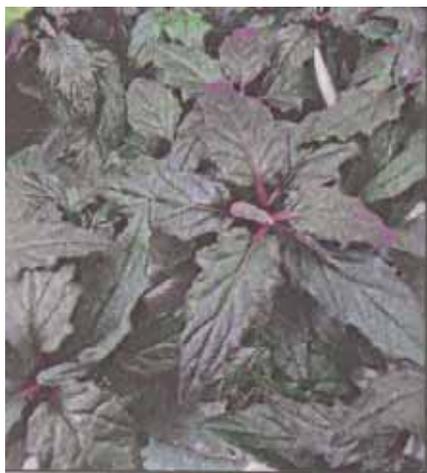
## RESOURCES:

- 'Toxic and Non-Toxic Plants,' ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) [www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants/](http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/plants/)
- 'Safe and Poisonous Houseplants,' University of Connecticut Extension: [www.ladybug.uconn.edu/hotissues/SafeandPoisonousHouseplants.html](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu/hotissues/SafeandPoisonousHouseplants.html)
- 'Plants Clean Air Inside Our Homes,' Laura Pottorff, Colorado State Extension: [www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/Plants/clean.htm](http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/Plants/clean.htm)
- 'Beware of Poisonous Houseplants,' University of California, San Francisco: [www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/factsheets/PoisonplantenEn1108.pdf](http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/factsheets/PoisonplantenEn1108.pdf)
- 'Houseplant Insect Control,' University of Minnesota Extension: [www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/m1183.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/m1183.html)
- 'Dealing with Plant-Eating Pets,' Linda Naeve, Iowa State University Extension: [www.extension.iastate.edu/news/2005/jan/jan0523.htm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/2005/jan/jan0523.htm)

According to a NASA study, the plants listed below proved effective in removing certain indoor air pollutants.

Pollutant	Source	Plants that Remove Pollutant
Benzene	Inks, oils, paints, plastics, rubber, dyes, detergents, gasoline, pharmaceuticals, tobacco smoke, synthetic fibers	English Ivy, <i>Dracaena marginata</i> , <i>Warneckei</i> , Chrysanthemum, Gerbera Daisy, Peace lily
Formaldehyde	Foam insulation, plywood, pressed-wood products, grocery bags, waxed paper, fire retardants, adhesive binders in floor coverings, cigarette smoke, natural gas	Azalea, Philodendron, Spider plant, Golden Pothos, Bamboo palm, Corn plant, Chrysanthemum, Mother-in-law's tongue
Trichloroethylene	Primarily used in the metal degreasing and dry cleaning industries; also in printing inks, paints, lacquers, varnishes, adhesives	Gerbera Daisy, Chrysanthemum, Peace lily, <i>Warneckei</i> , <i>Dracaena marginata</i>

The NASA researchers suggest that for plants to be effective "air cleaners," use 1 potted plant per 100 square feet of home or office space. (Information courtesy of the Foliage for Clean Air Council, National Academy of Sciences and Colorado State University Extension.)



Above left: The Purple Passion plant displays appealing colors which may attract children. Fortunately, it is considered safe and not poisonous to humans. Above right: LeaAnn Newman, a sales assistant at Summersun Nursery and Landscaping in Mount Vernon, arranges spider plants on a display table Wednesday in the retail store. Their dangling stems are tempting to children and pets, but spider plants are nonpoisonous and are considered a good choice for helping clean indoor air of pollutants. **Photos by Frank Varga / Skagit Valley Herald.**