

## Springtime Garden Hazards for Pets

Spring has sprung and those of us with gardens have been quick to head outdoors to start puttering. And our pets are coming outside with us! But are our gardens safe for our four legged companions? What types of hazards may be awaiting us in the backyard? Can we make it safer? Let's take a look at some of the common hazards in the backyard garden and see if we can't spare you some unnecessary veterinary expenses in these challenging economic times!

**Structural hazards:** Take a walk around your garden and look at the structures currently present and assess their state of repair. Look for fences that may be unstable and starting to rot. Check for protruding nails and spots where limbs or heads may get caught in holes. Check the deck and balcony and make sure pets won't fall or get trapped. Look at water hazards. Deep ponds or pools are as much a hazard for furry creatures as they are for children.

**Chemical hazards:** Many of the pesticides and herbicides are hazardous to pets. Read the label. If it is toxic to you...it's toxic to pets. You might not eat slug bait, but your dog will! If you have spread fertilizer and weed killer on your lawn, keep your pet off of it for 24 hours. And don't even think about rat or mouse bait...get a cat instead! If you have pets consider changing your gardening habits. Look at companion planting and natural pest control. Besides, we have an obligation to preserve our underground water sources and soil quality for future generations. Don't stop thinking about chemicals at the garden shed. What is your deck treated with? Has it been sealed? And don't forget to keep the citronella candles away from those inquisitive Labradors that will eat anything.

**Botanical hazards.** The number of plants that are toxic is huge! The ASPCA site [www.aspc.org/toxicplants/M01947.htm](http://www.aspc.org/toxicplants/M01947.htm) can help. There are over 444 different toxic plants listed. Generally, bulbs tend to be toxic, as are many ferns. Beware of lilies, and be careful with the rhododendrons, Japanese Yews and Ivy's. Many of the local garden shops can help you choose pet friendly plants. But most importantly, remember to check it out before you plant it! If it is already in your garden, check the websites too. Plant toxins are not limited to those in the ground. Watch the pond. Blue green algae can be toxic (besides being unsightly.) And since I suggested going natural, may I remind you to put a good solid lid on the compost. Keep your dog out of it.

**Zoological hazards.** The most common hazards is the bug bite! Stinging insects can cause your pet's face to swell. And don't let them quarrel with wildlife. Even deer can mean trouble!

**Decorative hazards.** Yes, dogs will eat anything. Mulch is a favourite. Rocks can be quite palatable too. This is the number one item I end up removing from the intestinal tract of dogs! And cocoa mulch is toxic (too much theobromine, just like in chocolate)!

Yes, it is a lot of work to pet proof a garden. But remember – a pet proof garden is also a child proof garden. It can increase the value of your property. Just as with children, pets should not be allowed in the garden unsupervised. If you must leave them unsupervised put them in a safe and secure environmentally enriched pen or enclosure that includes shelter from sun or rain and ready access to water. It can save you some costly veterinary bills!