

Health and welfare information about your cat from Vetlexicon Felis.



Garden hazards – how to keep your cat safe

The garden is something to be enjoyed by all the family particularly in warm weather, but there are potential hazards that can occasionally result in serious health risks to pets.

What are the potential hazards to pets in the garden?

Fertilisers

Fertilisers, including bonemeal, are commonly used in spring and autumn, and although of relatively low toxicity they can cause gastrointestinal upset (including vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal tenderness) and irritation to the skin, shivering or muzzle swelling. The signs usually start 2-6 hours after exposure.

Weed killers

A variety of products are available to control weeds. Glyphosate is the active ingredient in many weed killers. It is irritant and causes gastrointestinal signs (usually drooling, vomiting, diarrhoea, inappetence) and sometimes more severe poisoning with breathing problems (more commonly seen in cats than in dogs), convulsions and low heart rate. The signs

usually start 30 min to 2 h after exposure.

The outcome is usually good, but veterinary supportive treatment is required.

Lawn feed, weed and moss killers

These generally contain fertilisers (see above), weed killers and ferrous sulphate to kill moss. All the chemicals are irritant and can cause gastrointestinal upset and there is also the risk of iron poisoning which can result in severe gastrointestinal signs, shock and liver failure.

Compost

Compost heaps are full of moulds that break down the vegetation to form the compost. Some moulds produce toxic compounds that can cause tremors and convulsions, if eaten. Occasionally, other signs such as vomiting, unable to walk properly, panting or dilated pupils can also be seen. The onset of signs is quick within 30 min of ingestion.

In cases of mould ingestion, seek emergency veterinary treatment. However, when treatment is instituted, pets tend to do well.

Cocoa mulch

Cocoa mulch is made of cocoa shells. It is a potential significant source of poisoning if eaten by dogs because it contains theobromine, the toxic chemical in chocolate. Clinical signs of chocolate poisoning include vomiting, hyperactivity, restlessness and tremors. In the worst cases, high blood pressure, seizures and heart arrhythmias can also occur. Signs occur within 4 h of ingestion. Pets do well after receiving symptomatic treatment.

Paddling pools and ponds

In very hot weather dogs may drink excessive amounts of water from pools and are at risk of water intoxication. This can result in vomiting, restlessness, weakness and convulsions. There is also a risk of drowning in garden ponds, particularly with young puppies.

Slug and snail killers

These can contain a variety of ingredients. Many products contain metaldehyde and this can cause tremors and convulsions which can start soon after ingestion. Liver failure and blood coagulation problems have also been reported following metaldehyde ingestion. Some products contain ferric phosphate which cause gastrointestinal upset or methiocarb which

can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, muscle tremors and twitching, slow heart rate and convulsions. Prognosis is poor without aggressive treatment, but survival is reported to be 85% when pets are treated.

Bees and wasps

Stings from bees or wasps can cause pain and swelling and sometimes the swelling can be extensive. Allergic reactions can occur in some animals with collapse and breathing difficulties. In animals with multiple stings it can take 24 hours or more for your pet to become seriously unwell with kidney failure, liver damage and breathing difficulties.

Barbecues

Barbecue lighter fluid contains a hydrocarbon fuel which is irritant to the skin, eyes and the gut and can cause oral ulceration, skin inflammation and burns, vomiting and breathing difficulties. There is also a risk of burns from hot barbecues. Foreign body ingestion including kebab sticks or bones can also occur and will sometimes require veterinary attention.

Mushrooms/toadstools

Fungi produce their fruit bodies (mushrooms and toadstools) when the weather is wet and mild, commonly in the autumn. Some fungi cause gastrointestinal signs, others can cause hallucinations and behavioural changes but a few are extremely toxic and can cause delayed kidney and liver failure. There are thousands of species and they can be difficult to identify without expert knowledge. If your pet has eaten a mushroom and there are some left take photos of it (including photos showing where it is growing and the underneath, as there are features on the underside that are important for identification) and then dig it up and take it and your pet to your vet - if your pet has vomited after ingestion, bringing this in a plastic tub can also aid identification of the mushroom and treatment.

Patio cleaners

Benzalkonium chloride is a common ingredient in household disinfectants and some patio cleaners. Benzalkonium chloride exposure can cause oral inflammation and ulceration, drooling and high body temperature. Effects can be delayed by several hours so you may not immediately connect the use of the product as the cause of your pet's illness.

Poisonous plants

There are many different garden plants and although most are not considered toxic, eating of any plant material may result in gastrointestinal signs such as vomiting and diarrhoea.

The following plants are potentially more hazardous:

- *Laburnum* species
- *Pieris* species and *Rhododendron* species (including azaleas)
- Lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*).
- Yew (*Taxus* species)
- Autumn crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*)
- Daffodil (*Narcissus* species)
- Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*)
- Foxglove (*Digitalis* species)

How can I keep my cat safe in the garden?

Make sure that you store products in their original containers, of pets and ensure shed and garage doors where products are stored are closed securely.

Always replace the tops of containers securely after use and always read the directions of household and garden products before use and use as directed.

Clean up spills promptly and do not allow your pet to walk through spills or puddles of pesticide products.

Do not allow your pet to drink from watering cans if they contain a garden product.

Ensure plant bulbs are stored safely before planting.

What should I do if I think my cat has been exposed to something in the garden?

- Remove your pet from the source of poisoning.
- If you can do so safely, remove any suspect material from your pet's mouth.
- If practical collect a sample of what has been eaten and/or a sample of vomit.

- If it's on the skin, wash with tepid water and soap then rinse and dry. Prevent your pet from licking it (you can put a buster collar onto your pet if you have one in the house).
- Do not attempt to make your pet vomit.
- If your pet is having a seizure, remain calm and make sure you don't get close to the mouth to prevent bites. If possible, remove all external noise (eg TV, radio) and keep lights low.
- Contact your vet for advice and be prepared to take your pet and the suspect material to the veterinary surgery.

What information will help my vet?

On arrival at the veterinary surgery someone will assess your pet immediately and make sure that its condition is stable before any other treatments are instigated. Your vet will want to know:

- What your pet has eaten or inhaled. If possible, indicate the quantity.
- How long ago the incident happened.
- If your pet is showing any signs of being unwell.
- If your pet is receiving any medication or has any pre-existing medical conditions.