

### **HOLIDAY HAZARDS- HOW TO PROTECT YOUR PETS**

As you get ready to decorate your home for the festive season, remember that from a cat's concerned, a holiday tree in the living room is there for climbing and kitty fun. And, whether it's a real tree or an artificial one, your dog may consider it a conveniently placed indoor bathroom.



Here are some simple safety tips to keep decorations intact and pets out of harm's way.

Avoid hanging edible ornaments—including festive dog treats shaped like Santa Claus or gingerbread men—or decorating with small toys, such as catnip-filled mice and brightly colored crinkly balls. Most pets are unable to resist the urge to investigate, potentially causing damage to the tree or hurting themselves in the process. Similarly, edible and catnip-infused gifts should never be left unattended.

Discourage feline and canine interest in the tree by sprinkling the tree skirt and lower branches with ordinary household ground white pepper or spraying them with a nontoxic taste deterrent.

Poinsettias are popular holiday flowers often used to decorate the base of the tree, as well as other places throughout the home; however, the white, milky sap in their leaves is toxic to pets. Consider using realistic silk plants instead, or sprinkle pepper on the leaves as a deterrent.

The festive season is also synonymous with beautiful candles. However, if there are pets (or small children) in the home, it's a good idea to decorate with flameless candles. These will add ambience to the home and prevent serious accidents.

It is important to ensure cables for holiday lights are well concealed. Curious pets may be tempted to chew on electric cables, which can result in burns, singed whiskers, or even fatal electrocution. Special cable covers infused with citronella can be used to deter chewing.

It's easy to lose track of pets when entertaining. Appoint a responsible family member to be the designated pet watcher. Regular supervision is necessary to ensure pets do not get outside or steal food when no one is looking.

The remains of a holiday meal, including bones, corncobs, and plastic utensils—can cause serious harm if ingested. Many holiday foods, such as onions, garlic, grapes and raisins, and that box of chocolates your friend brought as a hostess gift, are also toxic to pets.

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Keep alcohol out of reach. Alcoholic beverages and food products containing alcohol can cause vomiting, diarrhea, decreased coordination, central nervous system depression, difficulty breathing, tremors, abnormal blood acidity, coma, and even death. Deliberately getting a pet drunk is considered animal cruelty and is punishable by law.

Despite the term “party animal,” most dogs and cats do not enjoy big gatherings. From their standpoint, it’s a stressful invasion of their territory. An anxious pet may even try to escape through an open, unattended door. If you entertain frequently during the festive season, consider giving your pets their own party by sequestering them in a quiet room and providing lots of distraction toys and treats. You will have a better time knowing they are safe, too!