

# Have a pet-friendly holiday

BY VIRGINIA L. DAKINIEWICH

We all love the holidays. Pulling out the sparkling decorations and setting up the tree - it's an exciting time of year. We all love our pets too. Those shiny glass decorations that appear once a year can be just too much for them to resist and may be hazardous to their health. Virginia Dakiniewich lists some ideas on how to keep your pet safe this Christmas.

It's the time of year when shiny decorations are in full display, homes are aglow with colourful lights and we are surrounded by an array of holiday treats. The edibles, gifts, decorations and accoutrements of the season that make our holidays special can be dangerous for our pets.

## Christmas Trees

The Christmas tree is often a magnet for the family dog or cat. Cats cannot resist playing with sparkling ornaments and dogs like to drink from the tree's water. If you have a real tree, do not use chemicals in the water, or keep it covered with a tree skirt so animals cannot drink from it. Avoid decorating your tree with popcorn or edible items as these may attract pets' attention. Hang small or breakable ornaments higher up on the tree or out of reach. There is nothing as frustrating as returning home from a holiday party or shopping trip to find your tree capsized and decorations scattered around. Cats and dogs have been known to knock over entire Christmas trees so secure the tree to a wall or ceiling with durable string. Switch off tree lights when you are not around and unplug them when not in use to prevent pets from entangling themselves in the cords. Sweep up tree needles, either real or artificial, so pets do not try to eat them.

Clean up all tinsel, ribbons, and small hooks when you are finished decorating. If tinsel is ingested, the animal usually cannot digest it and it may become twisted within the intestines, requiring surgical removal. Better yet, avoid using tinsel altogether. Glass ornaments are a particular hazard; they can be easily knocked down and chewed on by pets, cutting their mouths or paws. If ingested, this would mean an emergency visit to the veterinary clinic. Stepping on broken glass would be a hazard for people as well.

## Electric Displays

Christmas lights are pretty attractions but can be hazardous to inquisitive pets. Ensure all connections and outlets are secured and concealed and tape cords to the walls or floors. Dogs or cats chewing on electrical cords face dangers ranging from burned mouths to electrical shock to death by electrocution, definitely not a way we wish to remember the holiday.

## Holiday Plants

Holiday plants, such as poinsettias and holly can be very dangerous for your pets. If these plants are ingested,



they may cause vomiting, diarrhea or otherwise upset the animal's digestive tract. Keep seasonal plants well out of reach of pets.

## Food

Do not give leftover turkey, chicken, ham or roast beef bones to your pet. Bones may splinter easily and if ingested, can cause obstructions or perforations in the bowel or throat. Also avoid giving pets holiday meal leftovers; being fed unfamiliar or high fat foods such as gravy or dressing may lead to stomach upsets or gastrointestinal problems. Also make sure

guests refrain from feeding your pets.

Avoid giving pets any holiday treats especially those containing chocolate, alcohol, raisins and onions; they can be toxic to your pet. Chocolate is a perennial favorite for humans but may prove lethal for a pet. Effects may range from vomiting and some diarrhea to seizures and even death. Chocolate contains theobromine, a compound that is a cardiac stimulant and a diuretic. Cocoa powder and cooking chocolate are the most toxic forms. Semi-sweet chocolate and dark chocolate are the next most dangerous forms, with milk chocolate being the least dangerous. A dog needs to eat more than a 250gm block of milk chocolate to be affected. Obviously, the smaller the dog, the less it needs to eat. (Entirely Pets website <http://www.entirelypets.com/toxicfoods.html>)

Keep edible gifts or beverages off the floor or out of paws reach.

## Miscellaneous

Many of us like to burn scented candles at this time of year. Place candles in places that are out of reach to your pets and do not let candles burn unattended, a safety precaution for anytime of the year.

Don't let pets get too close to fireplaces, in case of burning embers. After your gifts are opened, quickly dispose of all plastic wrappings, ribbons, and bows that can be easily swallowed by pets. Any sort of string or ribbon can be mistaken for a toy and become hazardous.

It may be a good idea to make sure your pets have a safe quiet place where they can rest or consider keeping them locked up safely in a room where they can escape from the noise and festivities. If they are more social, make sure they do not become overwhelmed or overstimulated. They need peace and quiet to unwind just as people do.

With all the stress and extra work this time of year, it

is hard to remember everything we have to do to ensure a great holiday for all. The needs of our pets may be overlooked in the hubbub of parties and family gatherings. As responsible pet owners, we need to ensure a safe and happy holiday for our animal companions.

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