

Poinsettias are mildly toxic to cats and dogs, but they are not usually a serious poisoning risk. Chewing the leaves or stems can irritate the mouth and stomach, so keep the plant out of reach and call a vet if your pet becomes ill.

What poinsettias can do to pets

The milky sap in a poinsettia can irritate a pet's mouth and digestive tract. A cat or dog that chews the plant may drool, lick its lips or vomit. Some pets may also have diarrhea.

The sap can irritate skin or eyes if it gets on them. Signs of eye irritation include redness, watering and squinting. A pet may rub its face or paw at the affected eye.

Not every pet that nibbles a poinsettia will become sick. The amount eaten and the individual animal matter, and a vet can help you judge what to do. Do not assume that every stomach upset during the holidays came from the plant.

What to do after a nibble

Take the plant away from your pet and remove any loose pieces from its mouth if you can do so safely. Offer a little water to drink. Do not force water into its mouth or try to make it vomit.

Call your veterinarian for advice, especially if your pet has symptoms or you are unsure how much it ate. Tell the vet which plant was involved, when the chewing happened and what signs you have noticed. If you cannot identify the plant, a clear photo may help.

If sap gets into an eye, contact a vet for guidance. Seek prompt veterinary care if your pet has repeated vomiting, seems very weak or has trouble breathing. These signs need attention, whatever the cause.

Make your display safer

The simplest way to prevent chewing is to keep poinsettias in a room your pet cannot enter. A high shelf may work for some dogs, but it is less reliable for a cat that climbs. Fallen leaves can still be reached, so pick them up promptly.

- Check plants for fallen leaves each day.
- Keep pots away from tables or ledges your pet can reach.
- Ask guests not to offer pets leaves or flowers.
- Choose a pet safe decoration if you cannot keep the plant separate.

Other holiday plant risks

Poinsettias are not the only plants to consider. Some lilies are especially dangerous to cats, and exposure to any part of a true lily, including pollen or vase water, can cause serious kidney damage. Contact a vet immediately if a cat may have been exposed.

Holly and mistletoe can also cause illness if eaten. Plant names are not always precise, so keep the label and ask your vet about any plant you are unsure of.

A little planning lets you enjoy holiday flowers without leaving your pet to investigate them. If chewing does happen, call your vet rather than guessing how serious it is.

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