

Flower preservatives can be harmful to dogs and cats, although the risk depends on the ingredients and the amount swallowed. Even a small drink of vase water deserves attention because the water may also contain material from toxic flowers.

What is in flower food?

A flower food packet is meant to help cut flowers last longer in water. Products vary, but they can contain sugar, substances that make the water more acidic, and ingredients that limit the growth of microbes.

A pet that laps from a vase may swallow a diluted mixture. A pet that chews a packet may get a more concentrated dose. You cannot tell how dangerous a product is simply by looking at the powder, so keep the packet or take a clear photo of its label.

Some people add household products to vase water instead of using a packet. Bleach and other cleaning products can be hazardous to pets, so do not assume homemade mixtures are safer.

Signs to watch for

After swallowing flower food or vase water, a dog or cat might drool, vomit, or have diarrhea. The mouth or stomach may be irritated. The effects depend on what was swallowed, and signs alone cannot tell you how serious the exposure is.

Call a veterinarian or a pet poison control service for advice, especially if your pet chewed a packet, drank an unknown amount, or seems unwell. Do not wait for symptoms if a potentially dangerous flower was involved.

Bring the packet and any information about the flowers to the call or appointment. If you know roughly how much was swallowed and when it happened, share that too.

Flowers can be the greater danger

The preservative is only one part of the picture. Some cut flowers and greenery are toxic to pets, and vase water can contain pollen or other plant material.

True lilies and daylilies are particularly dangerous to cats. Chewing a leaf, licking pollen from fur, or drinking water from a vase containing these flowers can cause kidney injury. If a cat may have had contact with one, seek veterinary care immediately. Do not wait to see if the cat looks sick.

Flower names can be confusing. If you are unsure what was in the arrangement, photograph it and tell the veterinarian what you know. Keep the arrangement away from pets while you get advice.

Keep bouquets out of reach

A vase on a dining table can look secure until a curious cat jumps up or a dog reaches the edge. Choose a location your pets cannot access, and check for fallen petals and leaves when you change the water.

- Store unused flower food packets in a closed cupboard.
- Empty and wash vases where pets cannot drink from them.
- Choose flowers known to be safe for your particular pets.
- Keep any potentially toxic arrangements out of the home.

Common questions

Should I make my pet vomit?

No, not unless a veterinarian specifically tells you to. Call for advice first, and do not give food, medicine, or home remedies to treat the exposure without veterinary guidance.

Is plain vase water safe?

Not necessarily. Even without flower food, it may contain material from the flowers or greenery. Give pets fresh drinking water in their own bowls and keep them away from vases.

A related guide: post-harvest care of cut flowers