

ARE YOUR HOUSEPLANTS SAFE FOR YOUR PET?

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Our five-month-old yellow Lab eats everything from mulch to electric cords. When Abbie started in on our Trailing Fish Hooks succulent, *Senecio radicans*, I realized I needed to make sure she wouldn't come to harm from eating our houseplants.

Below are listed a few of the plants that are considered safe for cats and dogs, even though if eaten, most still may cause digestive upset.

Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera*): Even though most web sites say *Schlumbergera* is safe, it may still cause digestive upsets. Check the leaf shape—if the edges are rounded/scalloped, you have a Christmas cactus; if they have two to four sharp points along the edges, you have a Thanksgiving cactus.

Blue echeveria (*Echeveria glauca*) succulent: *Echeveria*, sometimes called hens and chicks, has fleshy, blue-grey leaves in a tight rosette. Like most succulents, it is easy care—likes light and only occasional watering. *Echeveria* is native to Mexico and Central America.

Burro's tail (*Sedum morgananum*): Burro's tail, a native of Mexico and Honduras, likes lots of sunlight, not a lot of water, and is a good hanging plant. Although its tiny leaves break off easily, if placed on the soil surface, they will often root and make new plants.

Wax plant (*Hoya carnosa*): I've mentioned this *Hoya* before; I love its tight clusters of star-shaped flowers. It prefers bright light and weekly (or less) watering. Some websites said the *Hoya* has a sweet scent, but I have not detected any smell in mine. Also called the porcelain flower or Hindu rope, it is native to eastern Asia and Australia.

Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*): Some ferns are highly toxic, but according to the web sites I checked, Boston ferns are safe for both cats and dogs. These ferns, native to Florida and further south, prefer filtered light and high humidity, so you might want to give the hanging basket a daily spritz of water (an opened umbrella under the plant will catch drips) or hang it in the shower; a potted plant could be set on a tray filled with pebbles and water. And remember, just because the plant is called a fern doesn't mean it really is a fern: the asparagus fern is really a member of the Liliaceae family—lilies and tulips (www.gvnews.com). Who knew?!

African violet (*Saintpaulia*): Native to the tropical parts of East Africa, the African violet is best grown indoors; it takes a little more care than some other indoor plants, as it seems very sensitive to changes in temperature and light—it seems to like the same temps that people do.

Baby rubber plant (*Peperomia obtusifolia*): Not to be confused with the Rubber Tree, *Ficus elastic*, which is poisonous, the "Baby" or American rubber plant, *Peperomia obtusifolia*, is non-toxic. It is one of the few houseplants I found listed as native. It thrives in Florida, the Caribbean, and Mexico. The Baby prefers bright, indirect sunlight.

The following web sites are among several that provide information on plants safe for cats and dogs.

<https://www.akcchf.org/canine-health>

www.aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants

<https://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>

<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/100-poisonous-plants-maryland-university-maryland-extension-bulletin-314>

www.bhg.com/gardening

www.gvnews.com

www.hgtv.ca/green-living/photos/plants-child-pet-safe-1913786/#

www.thespruce.com/safe-houseplants-for-pets-4588752

Also, the University of Maryland Extension Service has published *100 Poisonous Plants of Maryland*, sectioned into indoor house plants, outdoor cultivated plants, and outdoor wild plants. Not all are native to Maryland. Detailed drawings of many plants and an index with common and technical names https://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/EB314_PoisonousPlantsMD.pdf .

What should you do if your pet does swallow a poisonous plant? Make sure you know the name of the plant ingested, including the Latin name if possible. Call a local poison control center or your vet. In either case, let him/her know the name of the plant, age/weight of the pet, approximate amount the pet has eaten, and any symptoms that the pet has shown, such as vomiting, diarrhea, strange behavior, etc. Some poisons are best handled with induced vomiting, but others are not.

Oh, and the Trailing Fish Hooks? Not safe for animals; causes digestive upsets. So we will keep our trailing plant trimmed and out of her reach.

Check the Master Gardeners' website for upcoming virtual seminars at <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>, or call us at 301-600-1596.



The African violet (*Saintpaulia*) basically likes the same temperatures and humidity that humans do, so it's usually happy in our homes and is safe for cats and dogs.



The Hoya vine, or wax plant, is safe for animals; its star-shaped flower clusters range in color from white to pink.



Catesbey's pitcher plant (*Sarracenia x catesbaei*) is safe for cats and dogs. Some other species are known to cause stomach upset but are not highly toxic.

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

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