



Picked up a Christmas plant? Make sure it's pet friendly...

Poinsettia, mistletoe, and holly. They are all plants we associate with Christmas, but did you know they are poisonous to cats and dogs? They're not alone either — several popular household plants are toxic.

It's estimated that over half (51%) of UK adults own a pet¹, with roughly 20 million pet cats and dogs across the UK, meaning many households could have unknowingly brought in Christmas plants that are toxic to their beloved four-legged friends.

Whilst festive foliage is a brilliant way to bring the outdoors in and invite natural Christmas cheer into our homes, it is really important for your pet's safety to make sure plants are pet friendly. Surveys show almost 10% of cats and dogs have fallen ill after eating foliage. Of those, 43% needed urgent veterinary care, while 15% died.

To help pet owners avoid a mistletoe misery, the UK's leading emergency vets, Vets Now (www.vets-now.com) has shared a list of the plants to keep out of your pets reach this festive season.

Head of telehealth, Dave Leicester, who looks after a team of experienced vets at Vets Now's [Video Vet](#) service said – *“As a nation of pet lovers we all want to make sure our cherished companions join in with family Christmas celebrations, but at such a busy time of year for families, it's easy to overlook the many hazards which can put them at risk of injury or illness.”*

Alongside the list of watch outs, the experts at [Patch Plants](#) have some clever tips and tricks for houseplant fans with pets, for both short term and long-term botanical interior additions. Patch Plant Doctor, Richard Hull, commented – *“Animals and plants are two things that make a house a home. When combining the two, there are easy ways to make sure pet and plant can live in perfect harmony, especially at Christmas.”*

¹ <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/get-involved/our-campaigns/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report>



Dave Leicester, Head of video vet at Vets Now, explains the popular festive plants pet owners should watch out for...

1. **Poinsettia** - Poinsettias are originally from Mexico and are famous for reaching full bloom in December. Their iconic red petals are actually leaves and they're mildly toxic to dogs and cats. Eating poinsettia can cause drooling, oral pain, and vomiting — but only if they're ingested in large enough quantities. On the plus side, the plant contains an irritant sap and it's unlikely your dog would eat enough to cause serious harm because of the taste and irritation from this. As with almost all poisons, the size of your dog and the amount they ingest will determine how sick they become. The bigger the dog the less likely he is to suffer after eating a small amount. Our advice is simply to keep poinsettias out of reach.
2. **Mistletoe** - The plant of love, Mistletoe, is as big a part of Christmas as Santa, but did you know it's also a vicious parasite that maintains its green colour by sucking nutrients out of trees? On top of that it is highly toxic to cats and dogs and, if eaten, can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, laboured breathing, shock, and even death from cardiovascular collapse.
3. **Holly** - While holly berries are an important winter food source for birds, they're toxic to dogs, cats and humans. Several varieties include saponins which can cause severe vomiting and diarrhoea if eaten. Other symptoms can include drool, lip smacking and head shaking. Don't bank on the plant's spikes putting inquisitive pets off either and, for the superstitious, it's worth bearing in mind that it's considered unlucky to bring holly into the house before Christmas Eve.
4. **Amaryllis** - Alongside poinsettias, amaryllis are the bestselling Christmas plants and can flower for up to two months if kept warm and dry. Not only are they a popular gift, they're also a poisonous one. The stalks, flowers and bulbs contain phenanthridine alkaloids which are toxic to both dogs and cats. The highest proportions are in the bulbs. Eating amaryllis can cause vomiting, changes in blood pressure, tremors, and seizures.
5. **Christmas cactus** - Another of the yuletide plants, the fibrous leaves of the Christmas cactus can cause irritation to dogs and cats, as well as mild stomach upset, but they're not deemed toxic.
6. **Christmas rose** - Originally known as the black hellebore, these hardy plants have been renamed Christmas roses even though they aren't related to the rose and rarely flower in December. They contain poisonous cardiotoxins and, if eaten, can cause diarrhoea, colic, lethargy, drooling and

abdominal pain. It's worth bearing in mind the entire plant is poisonous, including the roots, stem and flowers.

7. **Ivy** - If your dog eats ivy, also known by its Latin name *hedera helix*, it's likely they will develop vomiting, diarrhoea and drooling. In more severe cases you may also see blood in their vomit or faeces. Skin contact with ivy is also dangerous. It can cause conjunctivitis, itchiness, and rashes. It's worth noting that so-called poison ivy, *rhus radicans*, is a different plant. It can also trigger a painful reaction in dogs although it only grows in North America.

Clever tips and tricks from Patch Plant Doctor, Richard Hull (@patchplants www.patchplants.com)



Pictured - Priya Pinus Pinea, Big Ken (Kentia Palm)

- **Choose pet-safe plants** - Some houseplants can be mildly toxic if eaten, but we have lots that are perfectly safe if your pet takes a sneaky nibble. Your furry friends will probably have no interest in them anyway. Have you ever seen a dog eat a salad? [Priya the Pinus pinea](#) is a great pet-friendly tree choice at Patch. We also love a festive [Big Ken](#), spruced up with fairy lights and tinsel!
- **Hang 'em high** - Hanging pots are a great way to keep plants out of reach of your pets, even cats. If you have your heart set on a plant that isn't 100% pet-friendly, put it somewhere high up.
- **Use plant stands** - If you have a cat or a small dog, a plant stand will usually be enough to lift a large plant out of reach. As a bonus, they make your plant look extra stylish.

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- **Keep some just for you** - If you really love a plant that your pet won't get on with, keep it in a room where your pets won't go. If yours are anything like the Patch team pets, they'll always avoid the bathroom.

All of Vets Now's out-of-hours clinics and 24/7 hospitals have a vet and vet nurse on-site at all times. www.vets-now.com. Video Vets Now offer an [online video consultation service](#), where you can video chat with a vet within minutes.

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