

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Just look—don't touch!

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Watch out for beautiful flowers and plants! Did you know that there are many plants poisonous to either humans or animals, or both? The following is a skimpy list of plants whose toxicity can cause a mild skin rash or lead to death.

Hydrangea

What would San Francisco be without hydrangeas? Who would ever have thought that this fantastic flowering bush could actually harm my little bow-wow or mew-mew? If one of those sweet little pets had a nibble on a leaf, watch out for diarrhea and vomiting and even lethargy. The leaves and flowers of hydrangeas are especially toxic.

Clematis

I can't believe that my most revered vine could cause harm. Although it is mildly toxic, it is nonetheless considered a poison. If the beautiful clematis touches your skin, you may experience a mild to moderate rash with some burning. Hint: wear gloves when pruning.

Luckily, the plant tastes so yucky that most animals are not tempted to nibble on it. But if they are very naughty and curiously hungry, watch out for drooling, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Oleander

Have you heard the story of the two hobos who had a hot-dog roast? The dumb clucks used oleander branches for roasting skewers. That is why I am telling their story and not them.

Every tiny little part of the oleander is extremely poisonous, as well as the smoke from burning the plant. Symptoms of poisoning can include dehydration, fever, slow heartbeat, tremors, and death.

Oleanders contain naturally occurring poisons, specifically cardenolides or bufadienolides, that affect the heart. These poisons are called cardiac glycoside toxins, and they interfere directly with the electrolyte balance within the heart muscle.

Azalea and rhododendron

Both azalea and rhododendron are poisonous for pets. These colorful flowers

may add color to a garden, but they are still pet unfriendly. If eaten, flowers, leaves and stems can lead to nausea, abdominal pain, and difficulty breathing.

Both of these plants contain grayanotoxins, which disrupt sodium channels affecting the skeletal and cardiac muscle. All parts of the plant are considered poisonous, and ingesting as little as 0.2 percent of an animal's body weight can result in poisoning. Symptoms of poisoning in pets is drooling, vomiting, and diarrhea. Your pet may appear very uncomfortable and weak. Well, the poor darling has been poisoned. If that were not enough, your dear pet can go blind.

Rhubarb

When the first of the big juicy rhubarb stalks appear, I am searching for ripe strawberries. One of my favorite pies is strawberry-rhubarb, although I must admit that my rhubarb and strawberries are never ripe at the same time. Sadly, while rhubarb stalks are a delicacy, the leaves are rather poisonous.

One of the poisonous culprits in rhubarb is oxalic acid. During World War I, British soldiers were incorrectly advised that the *entire* rhubarb plant was nutritional. Sadly, the leaves are quite high in oxalic acid, which can cause kidney problems and stomach irritations. While rhubarb stalks are often used as a mild laxative and culinary confectionary, symptoms of toxicity set in within an hour of eating the leaves and can lead



Clockwise from top left: *Hydrangea* (community.saa.co.uk), *clematis* (pinterest.com), *Easter lily* (pinterest.com), and *rhubarb* (panteek.com).

to convulsions, internal bleeding, coma, and even death.

Dumb cane (dieffenbachia)

I wonder if the name "dumb cane"—also known as dieffenbachia, the common, easy-to-grow houseplant—came about because folks were too

ignorant to stop themselves from eating it. Dumb cane ranks as one of the most poisonous plants in the world.

If one of our four-legged friends (or a human) eats a leaf of a dumb cane, clinical signs of toxicity might be seen immediately. Your pet might painfully paw at its face and start drooling, foaming, and vomiting. And moderate to severe swelling of the lips, tongue, oral cavity, and upper airway would make breathing and swallowing difficult.

Easter lily

Cats are particularly sensitive to and easily poisoned by just a little nibble of the beautiful Easter lily. Death is usually caused by kidney failure. It is also poisonous to humans due to the alkaloid lycorine in the bulbs and stems.

Initial symptoms of poisoning are abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, excessive salivation, and shivering, followed by kidney failure and death. Sadly, there is no known specific antidote.

If you're eager for more information, visit balconygardenweb.com for a longer list of poisonous flowers. More information about pets and poisons can be found at petpoisonhelpline.com.

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