

# Animals Deserve Better - Holiday Safety for Companion Animals

We want the holidays to be a happy time for you and your companion pet, not a time for an emergency visit to your veterinarian. The food and decorations that make the holidays so much fun for us can be dangerous for your companion pet. We don't want this safety information to dampen your holiday spirits, but we do want you to be aware of the dangers and plan carefully to avoid these potential hazards.

**Dangerous Holiday Foods** Foods you eat or drink that you should never give your companion pet:

- Rich, fatty foods, like gravy or grease, can cause problems ranging from stomach upsets to pancreatitis.
- Alcohol can cause serious intoxications in pets, and many pets are attracted to the sweet taste of drinks, especially eggnog. Be sure to clean up and rinse all glasses after Christmas parties.
- Chocolate, coffee, and tea all contain components called xanthines that are dangerous to animals. Chocolate is especially a problem because pets love its flavor. Unsweetened baking chocolate and dark chocolate are the worst culprits, but all chocolate, fudge and other candy should be placed out of your pet's reach. Bones from fish, meat or poultry can also cause problems if swallowed. Be sure to keep bones (other than those made for dogs) away from your pet. Rawhides and hardened, sterilized bones are much better alternatives for your pet's chewing needs.

**Poisonous Plants** We all like making our homes more festive for the holidays. We enjoy the green foliage and colorful flowers of plants. Unfortunately, many of the plants we have in our homes during the holidays can be poisonous to pets. **Never** let your companion pet chew or eat any of these holiday plants:

- Holly
- Mistletoe
- Poinsettias
- Hibiscus

So when you brighten up your home, please place these plants well out of your companion pet's reach, or use imitation holiday plants.

**Gifts Under the Tree** Rawhide or other edible items left under the tree can be very tempting. And remember that companies often package rawhide or other pet gifts wrapped in ribbon. Make sure to remove ribbons or ties before you present gifts to your pet. If played with and swallowed, yarn, ribbon or string on gifts can cause intestinal obstruction, requiring surgery.

Batteries for toys or other gifts can be toxic and cause intestinal obstruction. Keep in a safe place until they are ready to be inserted in the gift.

**Christmas Trees** O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how careful we must be. Christmas trees and their decorations can create hazards for pets. Place your Christmas tree in a stable stand, and attach it securely to a window or wall. We've known others who have hung their tree from the ceiling! Consider using a scat mat to keep pets away, and make sure your companion pet is always supervised when in a room with a tree.

Tinsel's shininess is attractive. When eaten, it can cause blockages, which often require surgery to remove. This year, think about leaving it off the tree altogether. Chewing on electrical cords can cause problems ranging from burned mouths, to electrical shock to death by electrocution. Unplug decorative lights when you're not there or spray cords with Chew Stop.

Place ornaments that are shiny, or could be swallowed or broken high up on your tree. Larger, less intriguing ornaments can go near the bottom.

Decorating trees with food is asking for problems. Candy canes and gingerbread people can be as enticing to your pet as they are to children. We know of one diabetic dog who ran into some problems with regulating her disease because she was stealing candy canes off of the tree. Popcorn, raisin, or cranberry garlands are beautiful, but can cause an obstruction when eaten, requiring surgery.