



Prevent Pet Poisoning

Most of my pet memories are the type of memories that give me the warm fuzzies. But there is one memory that makes me cringe; my first dog (my Rottie puppy) had his way with a bottle of prescription medicine. I found a cracked open bottle and pills all over the bathroom floor. Since I couldn't be sure I could account for all the pills, off to the emergency vet we went. I am certain my rickety little GEO Metro broke speed barriers that night. Some wonderful vets took care of Hercules and everything turned out fine. I, however, was horrified with myself for letting the incident happen and decided I needed to take a hard look at properly pet proofing my home. Accidental pet poisonings are all too common and one of the main culprits is prescription and OTC drugs. The best thing I can do as a caregiver to my pets is to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Preventing a pet poisoning starts with knowing what is toxic to our pets. When I brought the first pets in to my home I had a huge learning curve in "all things pet" but I was a complete "goose egg" when it came to knowing how seriously dangerous some common household items are to my pets.

I also underestimated my pets' (especially a puppy's) ability to get into cupboards, closets and hidden corners that granted access to things that should be off limits. I learned very quickly that pet proofing my home was more than closing cupboards and clearing counters and it has since become part of our household management on a daily basis. "Proofing" the home for the pets isn't really much different from proofing a home for a child. Over the years I have found that maintaining a pet proof home keeps my house neat because it requires being diligent about putting things away - medicines, vitamins, chewing gum, salty snacks, raisins, batteries...nothing gets left out.

In some cases there are things that we have just parted ways with for the sake of our pets; we don't put any presents under the Christmas tree ahead of "opening day" and you won't find items like grapes, Easter Lillies or Poinsettia plants in our house.

Following is a summary of lessons learned for protecting our pets from poisoning that we have gathered over the years. I hope you find it helpful.

We spent some time learning what exactly is poisonous to our pets

It does take some time to do the research to get informed about what is toxic to our pets. Thankfully, there are some great resources put together by veterinary experts to help us along. The ASPCA website has a [A Guide to a Poison Safe Home](#). The Pet Poison Hotline website has a [Poison Guide](#) that gives you the signs of poisoning and levels of toxicity for most types of poisons. There are also resource guides for knowing which plants are toxic to your pets; [The ASPCA Plant Guide](#) and [The Humane Society Plant Guide](#).

Following is a short list of some items whose toxicity to our pets surprised me the most - surprising to me because they are items found in just about every home and not things I would have expected to be so toxic; houseplants (not all but many), grapes & raisins, sugarless gum and candy sweetened with xylitol, salt, fatty food (like poultry skin), onion, coffee grounds, garlic, ibuprofen, liquid potpourri, mothballs, chocolate, calamine lotion, sunblock, analgesic, vitamins and much, much more.

Below is the list of toxic items that the ASPCA recommends we as pet parents commit to memory:

- Alcoholic beverages
- Avocado
- Chocolate
- Coffee
- Fatty foods
- Macadamia nuts
- Moldy or spoiled foods
- Onions
- Raisins and grapes
- Salt
- Yeast dough

Keeping our pets away from these toxic items meant for us that we had to arrange the house such that our pets have no access to the garbage and are trained to know that it is not ok to counter surf or steal food from plates. It also means being aware of guests who

dine in our home and how they interact with our pets. Our guest may not realize that slipping the dog or cat a big hunk of chicken skin under the table is not doing our pet any favors and could actually hurt them.

It also surprised me to learn about different toxicities for cats vs. dogs. Some house plants won't bother a dog if ingested but could be fatal for a cat. Flea control for dogs uses different agents than flea control made for cats. An agent used in many dog treatments (permethrin) is not safe for cats. As a general rule we should assume that products we use for dogs are not safe for cats and vice versa. It is the same for human products; OTC medications, topicals, soaps that may seem harmless to us can be very dangerous to our pets.

It is probably a good idea to know the signs of poisoning in a pet. All too often no one witnesses a pet actually getting into something toxic but only witnesses unexplained symptoms after the fact. The Pet Poison Hotline Website has a good guide to [Identifying the Signs of Poisoning](#) in your pets.

Steps we took to "pet proof" the home, garage and yard

Home

Safety latches on cupboards don't just work well for kids, they are great for pets too. Installing safety latches on cupboards that have medicines or cleaners (including cupboards in your garage) is a fast and easy way to keep everyone safe. Safety latches can be found at any hardware store, cost only a few bucks and are easy to install (I did ours myself - easy peasey). We made sure this was a step done anywhere chemicals are present; laundry room, kitchen, bathrooms, garage, etc. We are especially mindful of latching up items like drain cleaner, bleach and fabric softeners.

We are also mindful of the pets' specific chemicals. We use Frontline Plus for flea & tick prevention for our dogs and keep the unused packets in a latched cupboard as it is toxic if ingested.

We have several senior pets so our pets have their own medicine cabinet. Dog medications and supplements are typically flavor enhanced to encourage their consumption - that means they are a heightened risk for mischief. We keep our pet meds in a high cabinet that is also latched. Because we have a multi-pet household,

placing items high enough to be seemingly out of a dogs reach is not safe enough. Our cats often join in cahoots with the dogs and will knock things down (say the Doritos on the top of the fridge) so everyone can get involved in the mischief.

Handbags

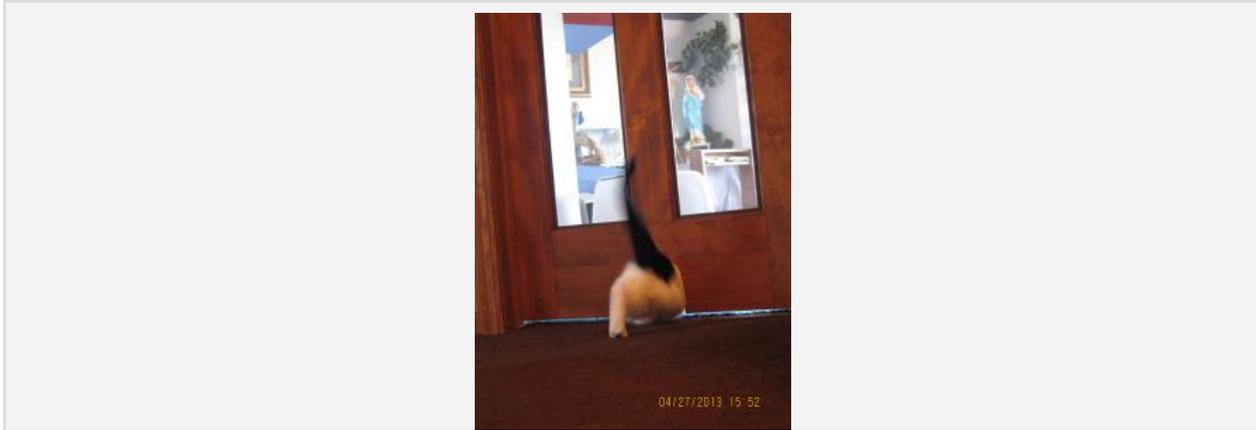
Ladies, our handbags are a hotbed of trouble! I used to have to put my handbag in a secure cupboard every time I walked in the door because my Rottie would eat my money (seriously - he had a fetish for chewing on cash). But really besides the cash - our handbags are truly dangerous. While a puppy may initially venture into a handbag to munch on that gently used Kleenex sticking out the side pouch there are two commonly found things in a women's bag - pain relievers and sugarless gum-that are incredibly dangerous for your pet. My own handbag isn't the only risk, when I have guests I make sure they store their handbag up and out of reach of my pets while they visit.

Litter boxes

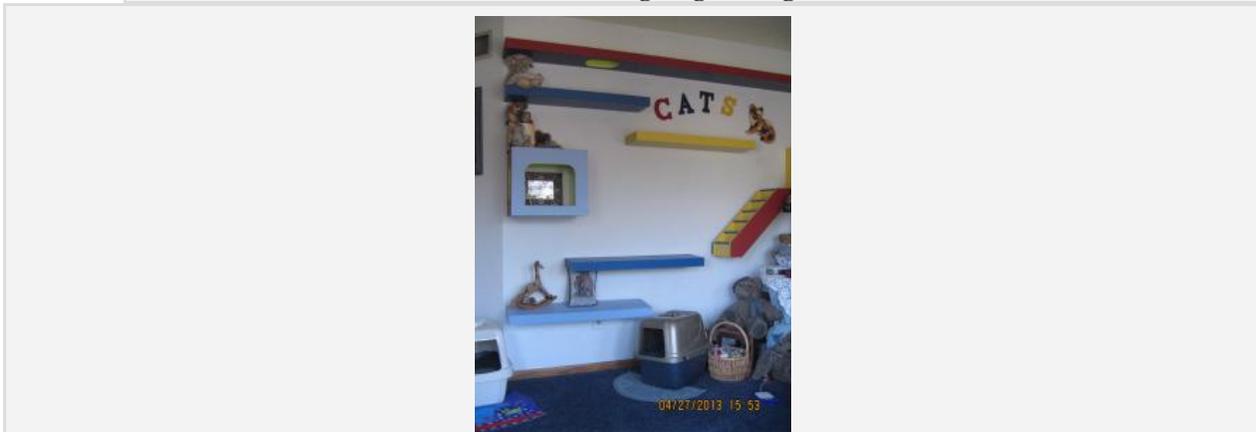
Ok, I know it's completely disgusting but let's face it - dogs love litter box cookies. Unfortunately, litter is toxic for them. We have a cat & dog household so we had to get creative with eliminating dog access to the litter boxes. I have included a photo of the door to the "cat room" in our house. We cut a hole in the door, big enough for the cats but too small for our dogs. This room houses two litter boxes. We have a second location in our basement that is set up the same way. Keep in mind it is in your cat's (and your) best interest to make sure cats have privacy and safety in their litter boxes. Getting ambushed by a dog while in the midst of doing their business in the litter box is a sure way to have issues with cats not using their litter box at all in the future. Before we cut the holes in the doors we used baby gates (wood framed with metal grates) to barricade off the cat room and we cut enough of the grate out to create a hole for the cats to pass through. Once we brought home our Lhasa, that no longer worked, as she just jumped the gate to get to the litter boxes.



This is our smallest dog next to the "mouse hole" that we cut in to the door of the cat lounge.



This is Taco's back-end going through the "mouse hole".



Inside the cat lounge.

Keeping things clean and safe at the same time

My pets pretty much hang out where I do and I spend a lot of time in my kitchen. They are usually lounging on the kitchen floor and hoping I accidentally drop something they can lap up off the floor. The kitchen floor is just a big plate/lounge area to them. Because of that, I don't regularly use commercial cleaners on my floors. I clean my floors with a mix of vinegar and water with a steam mop. They stay clean and sparkly with this process and I don't worry about my dogs lounging around on them. I know there are a lot of products on the market for cleaning that are deemed safe for pets. I have never tried any of them so I can't comment on how they work. Vinegar and water have worked well for us and it is also a super inexpensive way to maintain a floor that (in our house) requires getting a quick steam mop just about everyday. There are always times when we do need to use a commercial cleaner (something antibacterial) to clean up those occasional pet accidents. When this happens I take extra care, after I have

disinfected, to rinse the area several times with warm water and finally run over it with a steam mop (even my carpet gets the steam mop) to remove any remnants of chemicals.

I also don't use any cleaners that linger in the toilet bowls or in the tank. While we try to be diligent about keeping the lids down our dogs and cats will try to drink out of them any chance they get so I am not willing to take a risk of any chemicals lingering around. We use a Lysol cleaner but we flush several times after cleaning and put the lid down.

Pest management

I don't know about you but every fall we get a mouse (or so) in the house. There is nothing on the market for poisoning a rodent that won't poison our pets. It is as simple as that. Using a rodent poison in an area we believe our pet can not access is **NOT safe**. The rodent may eat the poison, wander out to an area our pet can access and get eaten by our pets. I don't have any pest control chemicals in my house (not bug or rodent). My husband takes care of the annual mouse by putting a spring trap inside the cupboard, inside the pantry (no possible pet access to where the trap is). The trap will do it if Catzilla doesn't get the mouse first (which he usually does).

We are fortunate to live in the mid-west so bug issues are really fairly limited. I have been successful (or just lucky) and have kept pest management under control with methods that are both simple and effective and chemical free. The first is that I am aggressive on clean up - if the crumbs and dirty dishes don't linger the ants don't visit me. Any opened food or food that comes in a box (especially starches) gets stored in a Tupperware (I should own Tupperware stock). One other thing I do (a lesson learned the hard way); when I bring anything into the house that is notorious for bugs (say flour) I put it in the freezer for a few days to make sure I kill off any possible bugs or eggs that may have come in the package.

I know there are a lot of seemingly natural options for dealing with pests (dish detergent, corn meal, etc.) but I do not have experience with them and would suggest researching them carefully and running them past your vet before using them if a pet is present.

Pest control that we may have to use outside, say to handle a wasp nest, is highly toxic for our pets. That makes it another item we store in a latched cabinet in the garage. We keep the pets away from the area that was sprayed for several days (we will put

temporary fencing up if it is in our backyard) and then hose the area down with water once the wasps are gone.

Garage

The garage is particularly dangerous to our pets; fluids leaking from vehicles, bottles of windshield fluid, yard products, piles of junk, etc. We have a closed and latched closet in our garage that houses any vehicle or outdoor products that the pets have no access to.

Antifreeze is worth its own mention. Antifreeze contains ethylene glycol which is **highly toxic** to your pet. A few ounces is enough to lethally poison a medium size dog. Unfortunately **antifreeze also has a sweet taste** so if it's leaking on to your garage floor its going to be very interesting to cats and dogs. Few pets survive being poisoned by antifreeze. If there is any fluid, of any type, on our driveway or in the garage, we take care to clean it up immediately and remedy the leaking car right away.

Yard

Pet proof the yard...are you serious? Yes I am. The yard can be a hotbed of toxins for our pets (especially in spring). Dogs especially are curious and led by their noses which makes piles of debris extremely attractive to their strong noses and unfortunately full of danger. Areas of pooling water, wood piles, leaf piles all can house mold, rotting rodents, etc. that can wreak havoc on a pet's digestive system. We have a separately fenced area of the yard for dog play that we keep free of tools, yard debris and anything that can fill with water.

Our labs love their swimming pools but they won't discern between taking a dip in pool full of clean vs. one full of dirty water. We use small kiddie pools for them but take precautions to make sure we aren't playing host to bacteria. We keep the pools stored upside down to prevent pooling rain water; fill them a few inches at playtime and then dump them out and flip them over until next time.

We keep mindful of where we walk

Its a shame but in suburban America a casual neighborhood walk can be a dangerous event for your dog. Our manicured lawns are covered with chemicals that can make our pets ill. Most lawn treatment companies will leave a sign on the yard if it

is has been treated - take these signs seriously! Watch for these signs and be especially careful to keep your pets off of those lawns. Unfortunately, if a tree has been treated or if a neighbor has treated the lawn themselves, odds are there will be no sign warning us that chemicals have been used on the lawn. We use a general guideline, if there are no weeds, dead spots or pet stains on the lawn - avoid it. In the warm months we usually walk our dogs at one of the many parks in the area and stick to trails and paths that are surrounded with natural grass (weeds) and brush that no one wants to treat with chemicals. A quick jaunt across a chemically treated lawn might not seem like a big deal, but our dogs lick their paws, and it only takes a small amount of poison to make them sick.

Springtime poses its own risks to your pets health, especially here in the midwest. When the snow melts, all sorts of nasty, rotting, molding things that have been buried for months and smell nifty to our dogs are laying around just waiting to get ingested. We had an experience several years ago with one of our labs (Sam) eating something moldy (unidentifiable) during a spring walk that gave him horrible digestive trouble. Sam has a weak digestive system as it is and this incident landed him in the hospital on an IV drip for dehydration. Since then what we have found most useful for preventing these types of moldy snacking incidents is to keep our dogs crisp on their "Leave It" command. We start re-hearsing when the snow starts melting. This is especially important with our labs. I am comfortable that their "Leave It" is strong enough if I can drop a hot dog on the floor right under their noses and they won't go for it when we give the command to "Leave It". If you want pointers for training in a strong "Leave It" see our training resource guides.

Wintertime walking also carries its own risks. Living in Minnesota you can't walk anywhere without salt or some form of ice melting chemical on the ground. Not only do these things hurt the dogs paws but they are toxic if the dogs lick their paws after being exposed to them. We keep towels and paw wipes by the door we come in and out of for walks and give each paw a quick wipe at the end of each walk. If you have a dog that is super sensitive to salt (and cold) on their paws, there are all sorts of pet "boots" on the market now.

We have an emergency plan

When I discovered my Rottie had gotten in to a bottle of medicine my plan was ...panic. I grabbed the dog (not the medicine bottle) and hopped in the car to race to the vet. It all worked out, but I could have done better.

The most important part of an emergency plan is knowing clearly what the first step is. In the event of a pet poisoning the first step is to of course remove the pet from the toxic source and immediately call a veterinarian for help. It can be dangerous for our pets to assume anything when it comes to a possible poisoning and attempt to treat them ourselves.

We are blessed in today's modern age with resources that are available 24/7 and in an era of mobile connectivity we are only a quick dial away from help. I have a phone list that has my regular vet's number, the emergency vet's number (for nights and weekends) and a poison control center next to our kitchen phone. With those numbers at my finger tips I can get help very fast at anytime of the day. I have these numbers programmed into my cell phone as well.

In the event of a poisoning if you have the item you believe the dog has ingested or been otherwise exposed to and you can transport it safely - bring it with you to the vet - it will expedite their diagnosis and treatment of your pet. If you don't know what your pet may have ingested but the pet has vomited or passed stool, take the vomit or stool with you to the vet.

Having quick access to our pets vet records is always helpful in the event of an emergency. Our pets may be treated by an emergency clinic who does not know their medical history and in a time of emergency I may not remember details. Some vets now keep all the pet records on the internet in a portal so keep your username and password handy for quick access. We keep the latest report from the vet in a folder in the car. I know myself and I know there is a good chance I won't remember the vet records in an emergency so the best place to keep them for an emergency is in the car.

There are two different reputable pet poison control hotlines that anyone can call - both charge a fee for their service but if you can't get your own vet on the phone it is sure worth the fee to get some help.

[Pet Poison Control Hotline: 1-800-213-6680](tel:1-800-213-6680). Pet Poison Control hotline is a 24 hour line. There is a \$39 fee the phone consultation (includes a follow-up).

[ASPCA Poison Hotline: 1-888-426-4435](tel:1-888-426-4435). ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center is open 24 hours, 365 days a year. They may ask for a \$65 fee for the phone consultation.

We also keep pet emergency kits in the house and in both our cars. The ASPCA recommends that you keep the following items on hand for an emergency:

- A fresh bottle of hydrogen peroxide, 3 percent USP (to induce vomiting)
- A turkey baster, bulb syringe or large medicine syringe (to administer peroxide)
- Saline eye solution
- Artificial tear gel
- Mild grease cutting dishwashing liquid (for bathing an animal after skin contamination)
- Forceps (to remove stingers)
- A muzzle
- A can of your pet's favorite food
- Pet carrier

Emergency kits can be purchased right from the [ASPCA store](#), at most pet supply retailers or you can just assemble your own kit. If you purchase a ready made kit be sure to add the extra items that won't come with it; muzzle, food, carrier, etc. We keep some extra things in our car kits; fold up water bowls, extra leashes, bottled water and towels.

I hope you found this post helpful. My goal was to provide you with links to the best and most trusted resources that I could find on keeping our sweet pets safe from poisoning. I also hope sharing some of the things we have done to pet proof our home can be useful to you.

If you do find this useful please consider signing up to receive our future blog posts or like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter.

Blessings from our pack to yours,

The Rescue Mama