5 Tips to Pet-Proof Your Garden

Miffy, a beautiful 12 week old Golden Retriever, presented to Vet HQ after her owner was advised by a friend that the plants Miffy had been chewing on in the garden were potentially harmful! Since arriving home, mischievous Miffy had been playing a dangerous game chewing on the highly toxic sago palm plant in her backyard oasis.

Miffy was admitted into hospital, placed on intravenous fluids, gastroprotectants and liver protectants. After a three night stay in hospital, many blood tests, and making friends with all the vets and nurses at both SVES and Vet HQ, Miffy is now living a healthy, happy and sago palm free life.

The case of Miffy brings to light that although gardens are often an area where dogs are left to roam free and enjoy the outdoors, they also are a potential risk for toxicity.

Here are 5 tips to help 'pet proof' your garden.

1. Beware of Poisonous plants
Some plants are so common in Australian backyards that people are unaware that they are toxic to their pets.
Pictured here is Miffy with her favourite Cycad chew toy, also known as a Sago Palm.

All parts of sago palm are considered poisonous, with the seeds (nuts) being the most toxic part of the plant. Sago palm contains cycasin, which is the primary active toxic agent resulting in severe liver failure in dogs. Ingestion results in acute gastrointestinal signs (e.g., drooling, inappetance, vomiting, diarrhea) within 15 minutes to several hours after ingestion. Central nervous system signs (e.g., weakness, ataxia, seizures, tremors, etc.) and severe liver failure can be seen within 2-3 days post-ingestion. Clinical signs include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, inappetance, abnormal fluid accumulation in the abdomen, abdominal pain, jaundice, and black-tarry stool. Aggressive decontamination and treatment should be initiated. Even with aggressive treatment, the survival is about 50%. [Pet Poison Hotline].

Other common toxic plants to look out for are yesterday, today and tomorrow plants, castor bean or castor oil plant, and *liliums* of all types.
For a complete list of toxic plants please visit
https://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/poisons/

2. Plant Herbs
Planting pungent herbs such as rosemary and sage will help keep pets out of the garden due to their distinct odour. Coleus canina – also known as 'Scaredy Cat Plant' was developed with a very pungent smell known to drive away cats.

3. Put plants out of reach
Using hanging frames or shelves and raising garden beds above ground level can help keep your pets away from certain plants. Even non-toxic plants can be dangerous for dogs if they come with sharp thorns or spines. To avoid abrasions and eye injuries, keep spiky plants like cacti, well out of your pet's reach.

4. Fertilize Carefully
When applied according to the package instructions products such as fertilizer, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides are generally not harmful. Pets are typically poisoned when these products are stored or used incorrectly. Dogs are particularly good at finding these containers laying around in the garage, chewing them and ingesting the contents. Proper storage and reading instructions can help mitigate the risks involved with lawn care products.

5. Retire the Rat Poison
Rat and mouse bait is designed to attract animals, making it extremely dangerous for pets. Ditch the rat bait. Securing garbage receptacles, sealing all holes and entry points, and non lethal deterrents such as peppermint and high intensity strobe lights are some alternatives to rat bait.

Dr. Ashley