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SUMMARY

Many lily species (*Lilium* spp.) can cause rapid and life-threatening kidney failure in cats. Most poisoning cases occur with indoor cats who may drink from a flower arrangement or contact the pollen and ingest it during grooming. Immediate veterinary attention is required if a cat ingests the toxin.

Killer Lilies?

by Bethallyn Black, UC Master Gardener

Love your cat? Don't let her eat or drink from your flower arrangements!

Grown for over 3,000 years, a symbol of beauty in art and literature, lilies entice the gardener, emerging from bulbs with large beautiful spring to summer blossoms. Originating primarily in the northern hemisphere from over 100 species, gardeners have bred over 6,000 named varieties. Lush prose in garden catalogs and web sites describe lilies as easy to grow perennials, providing fragrance and bright color outside and indoors as cut flowers.

Beautiful but Deadly to Cats:

Rarely mentioned is that lilies (such as Easter lilies, *Lilium langiflorum*; Tiger lilies, *L. tigrinum*; Asiatic hybrid lilies, and Rubrum lily, *L. rubrum*) contain a toxic chemical that can cause rapid and life threatening kidney failure in cats, the only known species with this reaction. Dogs that eat lilies can suffer mild gastroenteritis.

The unknown toxic chemical is found in the foliage, stems, flower petals, and

roots, and is particularly concentrated in the prolific yellow-orange pollen and can leach into the water in a vase of lilies. Symptoms can include vomiting, lethargy, loss of appetite and, with susceptible cats, renal failure and rapid death. It is not yet known what quantities will provide a toxic dose, and an antidote has not been identified as yet. Only small amounts need to be ingested to cause renal failure within three to seven days. Outdoor cats can be poisoned, but the majority of the cases occur with indoor cats.

Quick Action Needed:

UC Davis veterinary professor Larry Cowgill, co director of the UC Veterinary Medical Center San Diego says, "If cat owners suspect lily poisoning, they should contact their veterinarian immediately because a cat that has consumed the lily toxin very likely will experience kidney failure within 36 to 72 hours unless it receives appropriate treatment."



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For More Information:

For more information on many, many common garden plants toxic to pets, check out the ASPCA web site at

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>



Photo: Cheryl A. Reynolds, courtesy UC Statewide IPM Program