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Toxic Plants at the Holidays

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SUMMARY

Many popular holiday plants can be mildly to extremely toxic to children or pets that may be tempted to chew on them or handle them.

Select non-toxic decorations or use precautions.

For emergencies: call the Poison Control Center at 1 (800)-222-1222.

For more information about toxic plants and how they affect humans and animals, visit:

- www.calpoison.org, and
- <https://www.aspc.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control>.

Keep dangerous plants away from kids and pets.

Q. Are poinsettias dangerous to have around the house? Can other holiday plants cause problems?

A. Poinsettias have undergone extensive toxicity testing, and findings show that although they do have toxic properties, no deaths from this plant have ever been recorded.

Poinsettias, which are members of the Euphorbia family, contain a milky sap that is mildly irritating to skin and eyes, and eating poinsettia leaves could cause a mild stomach ache, vomiting or diarrhea.

But the toxicity level with poinsettia ingestion is so low that medical treatment is rarely necessary.

Many other holiday plants contain toxins, so using them in a house, school or day care facility can put young children and curious pets at risk. Teach children not to put any part of a plant in their mouth and keep plants out of the reach of pets.

Wear gloves when handling these plants, since many contain skin irritants. Some examples: amaryllis, azalea, bittersweet, boxberry, caladium, Christmas berry, Christmas cherry, Christmas pepper, Christmas rose, chrysanthemum, cyclamen, hellebore, hyacinth, jequirity bean, Jerusalem cherry, lily, narcissus, primrose, rhododendron, winter broom, winter cherry and tulip.

Though harmless to birds, holly berries can be poisonous to humans and pets. Signs of holly berry poisoning include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and nervous system depression. Ingestion of 20 holly berries could be fatal to a child. Call the Poison Control Center (800-222-1222) immediately if berries are ingested.

All parts of mistletoe are toxic, and exposure affects cardiovascular and gastrointestinal organs. At home, place mistletoe in netting or a plastic bag so the small, greenish-white berries don't drop on the floor, where children can pick them up. Again, call the Poison Control Center if any are ingested.



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The yew, an evergreen used in landscaping and some holiday arrangements, is also toxic. Ingestion of any of its parts can cause breathing difficulties, trembling, vomiting or even death. Call the Poison Control Center if any is ingested.

If you are advised to visit an emergency room or take your pet to a veterinarian, take along a part of the plant (not just a single leaf or berry) to help with identification.

Yikes! So what CAN I use?

Nontoxic plants that are recommended for decorating or gifts include the African violet, Bayberry, Boston fern, Christmas begonia, Christmas cactus, Christmas cheers, Christmas dagger fern, Christmas pride, coleus, spider plants and winter begonia.

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Photo by Joseph DiTomaso, UC Weed Specialist.

Holiday warning: Though harmless to birds, holly berries can be poisonous to humans and pets.

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