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What's Inside:

Beware of Toxic Plants

Page 1-2

Scoliid Wasps

Page 2-3

Serial Killer

Page 3-4

Now is the Time to Plant

Page 4



Beware of Toxic Plants

Ellie Mascara, SRCMGV

Americans love their pets. We treat our dogs as members of our family. We take them to the dog park, play frisbee with them, get their teeth cleaned, prepare delicious foods to delight their taste buds, and we even allow them to sleep in bed with us. We feel the same way about our cats. There is nothing like having a warm cuddly kitten as a companion.

During the holiday season, there is usually an increase in the number of animals that are adopted from animal rescue organizations. We love the newest member of the family, and we strive to keep them healthy, but there is one factor that is often overlooked, toxic plants. Here are ten of the most common plants that are poisonous to our pets.

Tulips:

We always welcome these flowers because they serve as a reminder that spring is on the way. Unfortunately, the leaves, stems, and roots are poisonous. The bulbs contain more toxic chemicals than the other parts of the plant.

Philodendron:

This plant is usually used as a houseplant. It is very popular because it can survive in a shady location and does not need a lot of care. The leaves of this plant are poisonous.

Lily of the Valley:

This sweet-smelling bell-shaped flower is extremely toxic to cats. If any part is ingested, it can cause heart problems.



Tulips: One of many toxic plants
photo:aspca.com



Oleander:

The oleander plant, which is popular in many landscapes in the south, is another plant that can cause heart problems in animals.

Azaleas:

Azaleas, some of which are native to our area, can cause digestive stress for both cats and dogs. This is true for both deciduous and evergreen azaleas.

Sago Palms:

Sago Palms are not palms at all. They are classified as cycads. These plants can cause digestive difficulties within a few days of ingestion. It can cause hypotension as well as diseases of the nervous system. The seeds from the Sago Palm are most deadly.

Cyclamen:

Cyclamen is another popular winter houseplant, which is known for its brilliant color. If your pet ingests this plant, it will affect its heart and may result in death.

Japanese yew:

This plant is often used as a hedge. The seeds, leaves, and bark are very poisonous.

Autumn crocus:

Autumn crocus is highly toxic to cats. If eaten, it may result in a long-term problem. It inhibits the growth of marrow, resulting in liver failure.

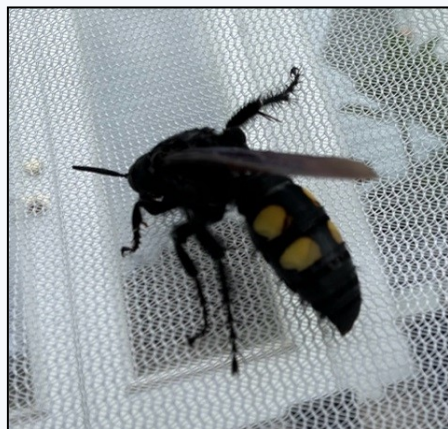
Rhododendron:

The leaves, nectar and flowers are all toxic to animals. If your pet eats any part of this, it may result in weakness, upset stomach or paralysis.

There are many more toxic plants that may endanger our pets. If you need more information, go to the ASPCA website where you will find an extensive list of plants that are toxic to animals.



Oleander Photo: Kristina Kutlesa, unsplash



Scoliid Wasps

Linda Lillycrop, SRCMGV

In late September I was perusing through my yard looking for caterpillars and other critters when I noticed a huge wasp nectarine on a Penta plant. At first I was in shock because of how large the wasp was and afraid since I did not want to get stung. But then I noticed it only had one wing, so I captured it with a butterfly net, put it in a mesh cage, and took pictures in order to figure out what it was. Turns out it was a Large Four-spotted Scoliid Wasp

(*Pygodasis quadrimaculata*). The family Scoliidae is represented in America north of Mexico by 20 species and numerous subspecies, in five genera: *Campsomeris*, *Crioscolia*, *Scolia*, *Triselis* and *Triscolia*. Scoliidae are composed of fairly large, stout-bodied wasps, often brightly patterned in shades of red and yellow, white, or one of these colors in combination with black. They range in size from 0.75 to 2 inches. Scoliid wasps are solitary insects so they do not inhabit a colony, although in August it can be common to see a large number of wasps actively flying at the same time. They are not aggressive and will not sting humans unless stepped on or carelessly handled. The *Pygodasis quadrimaculata* species are more common in the Southeast coastal states.

Females have four yellow abdominal spots while the color pattern of males can vary, but they frequently have yellow banding.

Adult Scoliid wasps feed on nectar and pollen of flowers. Their life cycle lasts about a year, and they are considered beneficial insects because they help control green June beetle and other grubs. The female wasp flies low across the soil in search of grubs. When it detects one, it digs through the soil burrowing its own tunnel or following one made by the grub. Once locating a grub, she stings it on the throat and paralyzes it. At first, the grub appears to be dead, but after a day or so it can feebly move its legs. Such paralyzed grubs can live for a considerable time. The female wasp then lays an egg transversely on the third segment of the grub. The paralyzed grub provides a fresh food supply for the wasp larva after it hatches from the egg. Once a grub has been stung, it never recovers. Research has also shown that some grub worms are easier to find around sandy soils after a period of rain because the grubs briefly emerge from the soil. That partially explains the larger number of species found in Florida and the Southwest. This area has an abundance of larval food with the least amount of energy expended.

Resources: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN745>

Serial Killer

Jenny Weber, SRCMGV

Most of my friends would be shocked to know that I am a serial killer, but it's true. It usually starts in March. I get an uncontrollable urge to plant green beans. I know it's wrong. I'm a Master Gardener. It's the right plant, wrong TIME. I do it anyway. Then comes the inevitable last freeze of the winter. As I stare at the death and destruction, I know, "I did this...again."

There are other times when I mean to kill. I have to do it. The other choice is to live with rodents and that's not acceptable. Not only is it unhealthy but it's expensive! One little rat can pack away 10 pounds of stolen feed. Did you know that the wiring harnesses on most cars are made with soy-bean materials? Yeah, they make very expensive and important wires that control everything, and are covered with a material that rodents consider food.

So what are the options? Poison? Totally irresponsible and harmful. I live in the woods, literally. If a poisoned rodent went out to die in the field and then got eaten by another critter, that would be terrible. I have pigs, dogs and chickens that eat all kinds of stuff that I don't condone, but they do it anyway.

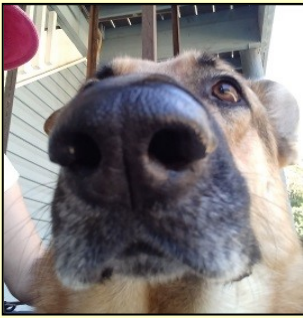
Sticky traps? I want them dead. I don't want anything to suffer. I'm not sadistic. Organic controls? We've had cats before and they only "work" for about 6 months. Then they figure out how to retire in the house, eat regular food (I'm not going to let them starve), scratch up the furniture, and stink up the place with the litter box (OR MY GARDEN!! NO!). My 2 dogs would not allow it.

Mechanical controls? Yeeeessssss (read it very sinisterly). The good old-fashioned mouse and rat traps are the best. Quick and easy kills. Very eco-friendly as they're completely reuseable, over and over again.

There are just a couple things I would like to share:

First, how to protect nose-y dogs, curious cats and suicidal chickens from getting snapped. I will either tuck them away between my recycling bins or set them under a milk crate. The holes are just the right size for them to go in and keep the good





guys out. I can check the traps just by looking through it.

Second, what to use for bait. A lot of people will use real cheese and come back to find an unsprung and empty trap. I've tried peanut butter which is better at sticking to the trigger but also brings ants. We use a block of super processed



imitation cheese. You know, the stuff that's only about one molecule away from being plastic. Seriously, a month in the trap and it still looks the same and the ants don't even recognize it as something worth stealing. I pinch off a little, warm it in the palm of my hand and smear it on the lever. Bon appetite !

Happy Hunting! Photos: Jenny Weber

Now is the Time to Plant

Rachel Coggins, SRCMGV

Fall and winter are the best times to grow some varieties of vegetables here in North Florida. Cooler weather and fewer insects are the main reasons.

Brassicas are leafy vegetables like collard greens, kale, mustard greens, lettuce, and turnips. Brassicas grow beautifully in our cooler months and thrive in Northwest Florida's winter temperatures.

"Brassica" is the shortened name for *Brassica oleracea*. It includes the above list plus kohlrabi, cabbage, brussels sprouts, broccoli, and cauliflower. These plants are considered one species. Plant them now.

My favorites to grow are collard greens, with kale and mustards coming in second. You can start them from seeds or buy these plants anywhere you normally shop for plants.

If space is limited, putting plants into a large pot on your porch is a great way to add high-density nutrition to your diet.

Collards are rich in nutrients with vitamins A, K, B-6, and C, calcium, iron, and magnesium. Prevention.com says collard greens can lower cholesterol, reduce cancer risk, improve bone and liver health, improve digestion, help you sleep, and make your mood better!

As Collards grow, snap off the bottom leaves and put in soup, stir fry, steam, or boil. Collards are best cooked and may need a seasoning of meat, such as pork, to help them taste delicious. However you cook them, give all the Brassicas a try this winter. Your health will be the benefactor.

Resources: ASK IFAS.com

Plants for Cold Weather : <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/plants-for-cold-weather/>



Photo: Rachel Coggins
2020

Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

Follow us on Facebook for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/SRCExtension/> Santa Rosa County Extension FB page:

<https://www.facebook.com/GardeningInThePanhandle/>

The Santa Rosa County residential horticulture agent, Josh Criss can be reached at 850-623-3868. joshua.criss@ufl.edu



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