

# The Pet Friendly Garden

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Spring is in the air. As the sunny days increase, so do the hours spent toiling in the garden. Victoria is known for its early growing season and favourable climate for creating beautiful and flourishing gardens. However, many gardens contain hidden dangers for dogs and cats, including toxic plants, mulch, compost and fertilizer. This doesn't mean you need to rip up all your plants or lock your animals away from your yard. With a little information and time you can build your own pet friendly garden that both you and your companion can enjoy



Designing and planting a pet-friendly garden based on your pet's needs is an important factor to consider, especially if your pet is permitted to run free throughout your property. The first key issue to consider is plant selection. Commonly grown plants such as foxglove, lily-of-the-valley, yew, oleander and kalanchoe contain cardio-toxins and can cause heart failure if ingested by pets. Other

common gardens plants such as rhubarb and daylilies are particularly dangerous to cats as they can lead to kidney failure. Rhododendrons and azaleas, both popular in Victoria, can prove harmful to pets as they contain toxins causing gastrointestinal problems. This doesn't mean you can never have these plants if you have animals, but you need to take toxicity in consideration when deciding where to plant. If your dog prefers the backyard, then consider the front yard for more risky plants, as well as window boxes or hanging baskets.

Not all plants, however, are dangers to pets. When planting in high animal traffic areas consider pet-friendly plants that are not easily damaged by wear and tear. Groundcovers like creeping thyme, sweet woodruff and periwinkle work well. Grasses are also tough-growing plants, and there are numerous ornamental types available, none of which pose a threat to pets if ingested. Also, consider plants such as marigold, snapdragon, pampas grass, bamboo, cornflower, crape myrtle and many others. If you are concerned about something in your garden, the ASPCA (<http://www.aspca.org/>) website has an extensive list of possible toxic plants for cats and dogs.

Sometimes it's not the plants you choose that are a risk for your animals, but plants that just show up. That's why weeding is essential in a pet-friendly garden. Many wild mushrooms produce aflatoxins, which can be fatal if ingested by dogs. Weeds such as foxtail grasses with barbed seed heads can cause damage when inhaled or impaled in ears or paws.

Other issues to consider when planting a pet-friendly garden are your choice of supplies. Cocoa mulch is a popular choice in landscaping. However, like chocolate itself, it poses a risk to dogs if ingested. Consider using less-toxic alternatives such as shredded pine, cedar or hemlock bark. But always supervise curious canines in yards where mulch is spread.

Compost can also be a tempting treat for dogs. Coffee, mouldy foods and certain types of fruits and vegetables are toxic to dogs and cats. Make sure your compost pile is securely contained, and keep your animals away from your gardens when you decide to distribute the compost.



Pesticides and herbicides are the most common cause of poisoning in pets. The most dangerous types of pesticides include snail and slug bait, ant and roach traps, and mouse bait. Slug pellets are especially dangerous to cats, since they find them to be quite tasty. If you do have a problem with slugs or snails, use an alternative approach such as beer traps. If you do opt to use these, make sure the area is securely fenced and inaccessible to pets, and also store any excess securely.

Finally, one of the best ways to create a pet-friendly garden is taking measures to keep pets away from sections that may not be safe. Ponds and pools can pose dangers if curious pets fall in and are not able to extract themselves. If you decide to have a water feature, ensure it is securely fenced. Also take into consideration natural wildlife. Fish-ponds may attract hungry raccoons, leading to altercations with your pets if cornered.



To discourage your pets and other wildlife from visiting areas of your garden, there are several environmentally safe products you can use. Most animals dislike the smell of vinegar and this can be used as a deterrent. Orange peelings work well with cats since they dislike citrus odours. You can also incorporate animal-repelling plants such as citronella or scented geraniums.

By following these suggestions you should be able to create a space that both you and your pets can enjoy.

