

November 17, 2017

By: **Spencer Perkins**  
**County Extension Agent**

**Pet Safety Through the Holiday:**

With the arrival of the winter months and holiday season, there are additional health hazards that are of concern for animals; some are potentially fatal. A few of these health risks could be brought into the home inadvertently, thereby increasing a pet's possibility of exposure.

To keep the season safe, protect animals from contact with or ingestion of the following:

1. **Antifreeze** - this mixture contains ethylene glycol, a product that can cause lethal kidney failure and metabolic acidosis (accumulation of acid in the blood and body tissues) if ingested. It has a sweet taste that attracts animals and can be toxic in small doses (i.e. 1-2 tablespoons can produce toxicity in a medium-sized dog). Antifreeze can be toxic even when diluted in water. At least one brand of antifreeze is available that uses propylene glycol for the active component as an alternative to ethylene glycol. Larger quantities of the propylene glycol-based antifreeze usually have to be swallowed to produce toxicity as compared to ethylene glycol-based antifreeze. Additionally, propylene glycol-based antifreeze does not metabolize in the animal's system to form products that cause kidney damage; however, it can still cause illness and death via metabolic acidosis. An antidote is time (all it takes is a few seconds for an animal to ingest it). It is worth noting that some snow globes may contain this product as well, so keep them out of reach from your pets.

**2. Chocolate - Baker's or baking chocolate is the form of chocolate that contains a higher concentration of stimulant (theobromine) than either semi-sweet or regular milk chocolate. The extent of toxicity an animal exhibits after consuming chocolate is based on a variety of factors, such as the type of chocolate ingested, the size of the animal, or an animal's individual sensitivity to chocolate. Some typical clinical signs of chocolate toxicity include excessive excitability, restlessness, increased heart rate, muscle tremors, vomiting, and diarrhea. The last two clinical signs may be transiently present due to an animal consuming any amount of chocolate (i.e., any ingestion of chocolate may cause gastrointestinal upset, but not extensive toxicity). The literature gives a wide range of toxic levels, so a veterinarian should be consulted immediately to discuss the appropriate action to be taken if an animal has consumed chocolate. There is no specific antidote for chocolate toxicity. Animals can be treated by a veterinarian to address any clinical signs they are exhibiting; vomiting may be induced within 2 hours of the chocolate consumption depending on the amount ingested and other factors.**

**3. Mistletoe - the berry of this plant is the most toxic component, especially if it is chewed instead of swallowed whole. If the berry is ingested in sufficient quantity, it can cause gastrointestinal and neurological signs, including convulsions.**

**4. Poinsettia - whether or not this plant is toxic has been debated for years. The most recent findings are that it contains no toxic chemical. However, as with any plant that an animal is not accustomed to eating, it can cause diarrhea and vomiting (a protective mechanism to eliminate the foreign substance). Animals tend to be attracted to poinsettias, so it is a good practice to keep these plants out of their reach.**

**5. Ivy - this plant is not acutely toxic, but it can cause gastrointestinal upset if ingested.**

**6. Christmas cactus -this plant is nontoxic, but it can cause vomiting and transient diarrhea if consumed.**

**7. Tinsel - cats in particular, are attracted to playing with Christmas tree tinsel. If ingested, it can cause an intestinal blockage or intussusception (prolapsing of one part of the intestine into the cavity of an immediately adjoining part). If indoor cats are present, it would be prudent to avoid using strands of tinsel. It would also be advisable to place breakable ornaments at the top of the tree. An investment in shatterproof ornaments might**

also be worthwhile.

These are just a few holiday tips to help you pet stay safe.

Winter Lawn Care:

As the winter months are upon us and the grass slows down in growth, be sure to keep it mowed at the same height or a minimum of 2 inches. Collect the grass clippings along with the fallen leaves for an excellent mix in the compost pile.

I know the temperatures are cooling off and it seems to be the perfect time to work in the lawn and prune your woody plants, however it is best to wait until as late as possible. The best time is late December through February and for most it is best to wait until right before spring green up. It is even recommended by some to wait until March for crapemyrtles.

Although it seems we should be through with fertilization of our lawns it is a good time to apply lime to our lawns and gardens if we need it. Many of our soils in East Texas are strongly acidic with limits the potential of plant growth. The only way we can know for sure is to take a soil sample.

The leaves have begun to drop, and it is key not to let wet leaves stay on the lawn. Wet leaves block beneficial sunlight and keep grass wet, increasing the chances of disease. Mow the lawn regularly to shred leaves into the turf, or rake them and add them to your compost pile. Leaves and grass clippings combined make some of the best ingredients for building a hot compost.

Build a compost pile (or 2 or 3) to deal with those leaves. There are several methods of composting and several ways to do so, many ways require a lot of work and time while adding several components and mixing the piles. It is not necessary to do every step you read about a compost pile to get those leaves to decompose. They will eventually rot and turn into rich soil amendment. It will just take longer. If you are not in a hurry, then pile up the leaves in an out of the way spot, and forget about them.

On the other hand, if you would like a source of excellent organic matter to add to your beds or garden in a few months, shred the leaves, and add roughly equal parts nitrogen-rich material, like grass clippings, to the leaves. Moisten the contents as you make the pile, which should be at least 3x3x3 feet. Turn it after each time the pile heats up.

**IMPORTANT DATES:**

**December 15<sup>th</sup> - Trinity Valley Ag Chemical Seminar - Mabank Fire Station,  
111 E. Mason, Mabank - 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. - \$25.00/Person -  
6 C. E. U.'s**