

## NOTE TO MY CLIENTS AND PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS

### On Pet-Friendly Planting

As Garden Designer, I will do my best within the scope of my profession, training, and expertise to help you create a pet-friendly garden.

Where I am aware of information indicating a plant is likely to be toxic to your pet, I will advise against planting such species. However, I cannot represent ANY plants as being “non-toxic” to pets. I am neither a veterinarian nor a toxicologist.

Having done plenty of research on the subject, I have found several reference lists through groups such as Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), Merck (Pharmaceutical) Veterinary Manual, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and University of California, Davis. None are what I would call a comprehensive list, and most refer to plants by common names rather than scientific (Latin) names. This is problematic in that many different plants can share the same common name. Plant common names tend to be regional. There do not appear to be any published, well-controlled (if that is even possible!) studies on specific plants and their toxicity to typical household pets. The reference lists rely on anecdotal evidence. That is, encounter and outcome data from veterinary medical treatment of domestic animals when there has been strong suspicion of specific plant material exposure.

When selecting plants for your garden, if you are a pet owner, I will avoid recommending plants with known or suspected toxicity to the extent of my knowledge. The same goes for other landscape materials. However, I am unable to justify the expense of thorough research for each and every plant or material consideration on a plan. My focus is rather on aesthetics, function, and climate-appropriateness of plants.

Responsibility and accountability for pet behavior and nourishment remains with the pet owner. More often than not, I believe issues pertaining to pets having unpleasant encounters with plant materials relate more to behavioral issues than to plant toxicity. Still, very few plants in an ornamental landscape are intended for consumption by animals. Well-behaved, well-nourished domestic and wild animals, generally, use their own instincts and avoid plants that might make them sick. Pet owners are advised to encourage good pet behaviors and seek veterinary advice for any pet behavior and/or nutritional concerns. If your own pet or others in your neighborhood have had unfortunate plant-encounter experiences, you will want to ensure that plants are well maintained in areas in which pets are likely to be confined or visit often, such a fenced areas, dog runs, rear gardens, and along sidewalks and streets, to remove temptations. This might include trimming low-hanging branches and picking up dropped fruit and fallen leaves.

On the flip side, as far as which plants are likely to survive encounters with your pets, that may be also a behavioral concern. Plant palettes may be quite limited in areas of your garden accessible to your pet. If your dog is a digger, you are not going to want to plant bulbs. If (s)he is a large dog and/or a digger, or you have a cat or dog that marks/sprays, you'll want to avoid small, tender plants or plants with brittle wood in or near the ground plane.

Essentially, how you enjoy cohabitating in a garden with pets or other domestic animals will likely boil down to trade-offs, and to keeping expectations reasonable. For more information about dog-friendly gardens, you may want to read [this](#) excellent article from *Sunset Magazine*.

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