

Pesticide Poisoning in Pets – Part 1

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For Print March 7, 2012

In our Master Gardener training, we are taught to minimize the use of pesticides because they kill beneficial insects and wildlife. Pesticides can also kill pets.

Because of their indiscriminate eating and chewing habits, dogs are much more likely to be poisoned than cats. The most common poisonings that I've seen in dogs in this area are from rodent baits and snail baits. The most common cause of poisoning I've seen in cats is misuse of flea and tick control products meant only for dogs. Cats react to many chemicals differently than dogs do. In general, they are MORE sensitive to pesticides than dogs are.

Always read and carefully follow all precautions and safety recommendations given on the container label, especially the fine print. Pesticides can cause serious problems when they aren't used as directed; sometimes even when they are used as directed. Take the time to know how to properly apply a pesticide, or decide upon an alternative, less toxic solution. The important part of the label is the fine print: the ingredients, the warnings on the back, and the 800 number. If your pet is poisoned, bring the label to your vet can to that 800 number and get valuable information on toxicity and treatment.

The internet is a wonderful source of information. If you "google" the ingredients, you can get useful information on toxicity. You can even get the MSDS (material safety data sheet) on line.

Herbicides are rarely, if ever, toxic to pets; however many pesticides are. Never mix a pesticide with an organic fertilizer because most dogs like the taste of organic fertilizers.

Organophosphates

These chemicals are designed to disrupt the nervous system of insects and they do the same to mammals. The symptoms are salivation, vomiting, diarrhea, slow heart rate and muscle tremors. There is a good antidote, but it must be given by injection every 2-3 hours for one to three days.

Never use organophosphates such as disulfoton, malathion, diazinon or chlorpyrifos if there is any chance your pet can be exposed. Organophosphates are very well absorbed through the skin, so ingestion is not necessary for poisoning to occur. Misusing the pesticide in an environment for which it was not intended can be fatal to your pet.

Synthetic Pyrethroids

These insecticides are based on pyrethrum, the natural insecticide found in Chrysanthemums and related plants. This is a very good insecticide, giving fast kill of many insects, but it degrades very quickly in sunlight, so it's gone within one day. In an effort to make a more commercially useful insecticide, chemists have changed the

pyrethrum into longer lasting insecticides. The synthetic pyrethroids last longer but are much more toxic, especially to cats. None of them are safe to use on or around cats.

You can tell synthetic pyrethroids because they end in “-thrin.” They include permethrin, phenothrin, tefluthrin, bioallethrin, bifenthrin, deltamethrin, gamma-cyhalothrin, and others. These products are often used in DOG flea and tick products and in foggers and yard sprays. They are the most common cause of insecticide poisoning in cats. Signs of toxicity in cats include muscle tremors and seizures. When applied to a dog, these chemicals can poison a cat that has contact with the dog. Be picky about what you use on your dog and assume it will be transferred to your cat.

Organic

Nicotine and rotenone are “organic,” but they are toxic. Citrus extracts such as d-limonene are toxic to cats. Pennyroyal is toxic to dogs. Melaleuca oil is toxic.

Insecticides Relatively Safe Around Pets

These include imidacloprid, acetamiprid, spinosad and carbaryl (Sevin). But these may still damage beneficial insects.

Storing Pesticides

Remember, all pesticides are poisonous. Store all chemicals in the original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from food or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, pets, and livestock.

To simplify information trade names of products have been used. No endorsement of named products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products which are not mentioned.

Next week, Pesticide Poisoning in Pets – Part 2 will focus on other types of pesticide poisoning and some of the antidotes for them.

Join Master Gardeners this Saturday, March 10th for Part 1 of Organic Gardening. This free three-hour class starts at 9 a.m. and is held in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville. Organic Gardening Part 2 will be held on Saturday, March 17th.

Master Gardeners are holding their Annual Spring Plant Sale on Saturday, April 28th. There will be a great selection of annuals, perennials and vegetables, especially tomato seedlings. The sale is from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and will be held in the Veterans Memorial Building parking lot. Don't miss it.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at

http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.