The spring thaw has begun, and many people will begin planting their gardens. Whether it is a vegetable garden with the promise of fresh produce or an aromatic bird and butterfly-enticing flower garden, know that some plants, bushes, and trees and their fruits are harmful to your pets. With careful planning and by picking the right plants, every Family member can enjoy the bounty of fresh berries and fruits or the vegetable garden.

**Toxic Vegetables**

- **Potatoes:** Green potatoes and the leaves and stems are toxic to dogs and cats. These parts contain solanine and alkaloids that when eaten in large quantities can cause drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, confusion, and slowed heart rate. Cooked potatoes are safe to eat.

- **Onions, Garlic, and Leeks:** These plants contain the toxin N-propyl disulfide, which can lead to a breakdown of red blood cells in dogs and cats. The destruction of red blood cells can lead to vomiting, blood in the urine and stool, weakness, and tachycardia (elevated heart rate), and if not treated can cause death. Cats are more sensitive to these plant toxins than dogs. The small quantities of garlic found in dog treats are usually safe for dogs.

- **Rhubarb:** The leaves of this plant are toxic, but the stalks are not. The toxins found concentrated in the leaves are soluble calcium oxalate crystals and oxalic acid. The leaves are bitter, which usually deters pets from eating them. If a cat or dog ingests a sufficient amount of the leaves, symptoms may include tremors, hyper-salivation (excessive drooling), kidney failure, and coma.

- **Mushrooms:** All varieties may cause dogs to get sick. Dogs will suffer from stomach pains, gas, diarrhea, hyper-salivation, and vomiting. There may be permanent changes to the liver and kidneys.

- **Broccoli:** The plant and vegetable portion we eat has been reported to cause illness in dogs, and in rare cases, cats. The toxins are isothiocyanate, which is a gastrointestinal irritant, and oxalic acid, which interferes with calcium absorption. In small amounts, broccoli is safe for your pet to eat.
Protecting Pets from Poisons in the Garden

» CONT. FROM PAGE ONE

Toxic Fruits
In most cases, the fleshy pulp of the fruit is safe for pets to eat in small quantities. However, some fruits should not be fed to your pets:

- **Grapes, Raisins, andCurrants:** These fruits are toxic to dogs, and there is some evidence that cats and ferrets may also become ill upon ingestion of grapes, raisins and currants. These can, even in small doses, cause vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, excessive drinking or urinating, and possibly acute kidney failure if left untreated. The toxicity is NOT dose-dependent, meaning even small doses can lead to toxicity in some animals.
- **Cherries and Apricots:** The seeds, leaves, and stems (all parts except the fleshy pulp) of these two fruits contain cyanide. When eaten in sufficient quantities, your pet will experience dilated pupils, difficulty breathing, bright red gums, shock, and even death if the pet is not treated immediately.
- **Fruit Pits and Seeds:** Apple seeds, cherry and apricot pits, peach pits, and plum pits are poisonous to dogs. They contain cyanide and if eaten in large enough doses will cause breathing difficulties, bright red gums, shock, and possibly death. They may also cause obstruction of the bowel and gastric upset if eaten in a smaller, non-toxic dose.
- **Tomatoes:** The leaves and stems are toxic to dogs and cats. Ripe tomatoes are safe to eat raw or cooked.

After selecting the right plants for your garden, be wary of a few other hidden dangers when planting:

- **Compost piles:** If you wish to create and use your own environmentally friendly fertilizer, remember to secure the compost in a closed container/bin. Your pet may ingest the partially moldy and/or rotten food leading to stomach upset and other serious health problems.
- **Bone meal:** An all-natural additive used to enrich soils, this product can be an attractive snack for dogs. Ingestion of sufficient quantities can cause vomiting, gastric upset, gastrointestinal obstruction, and in some cases, pancreatitis. Keep pets away from the area when applying the meal. Remember to turn the soil so the meal is sufficiently mixed into the soil to decrease its attraction to dogs.
- **Cocoa Bean Mulch:** Popular for its color and smell, this mulch also contains the same toxins as chocolate: theobromine and caffeine. Dogs are attracted by the smell, but if eaten in sufficient quantities, it has the same toxic effects as eating chocolate. Depending on the amount ingested, the clinical signs may include vomiting, diarrhea, and tachycardia (rapid heart rate). If left untreated, or if large quantities of this mulch are eaten, the signs may progress to hyperactivity, muscle tremors, and possibly seizures and death.

This is by no means a complete listing of toxic garden plants. There are many resources available to assist you in planning a spring garden. If you believe your dog or cat is sick from ingesting one of these plants, contact your veterinarian immediately or contact the Pet Poison Helpline® at: http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com. [Use of trademarked name(s) does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Army but is intended only to assist in identification of a specific product.]

The Ideal Time to Spay and Neuter Your Dog

Spaying (females) or neutering (males) your dog is an important step towards preventing pet overpopulation—doing so can save lives! According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA®), approximately 3.9 million dogs enter animal shelters; 1.2 million of these dogs are euthanized each year. Because dogs are able to have multiple litters per year and many pups per litter, their population can grow at an exponential rate. Spaying and neutering are crucial steps to keeping dogs out of shelters. There are also many medical and behavioral benefits to spaying and neutering your dog.

Additional Benefits of Spaying and Neutering
In addition to preventing unwanted litters, there are a number of health and behavioral benefits to spaying or neutering your dog.

» Female dogs will live longer and healthier lives.

- Spaying your dog can prevent several disorders of the female reproductive system.
  - Spaying can prevent pyometra, an infection of the uterus that generally occurs in female dogs 3 years or older that have had multiple heat cycles. This infection of the uterus is life-threatening and requires emergency surgery.
  - Reduces the risk of mammary gland and reproductive system cancers.
  - Eliminates the heat cycle (estrus).
  - May decrease roaming and escape behaviors.

» Neutering your male dog eliminates testicular cancer and prevents some prostate problems.

- Neutering before or shortly after puberty can result in fewer stereotypical male activities such as urine marking, unwanted sexual behaviors (mounting), and territorial aggression.
- Reduces roaming and escape tendencies, which may lead to being hit by a car or fighting with other dogs. Some dominance-related behaviors may be significantly reduced.

When is the Ideal Time to Spay or Neuter Your Dog?
Many veterinarians will spay and neuter dogs as young as 8 weeks. The procedure should be considered before female dogs experience their first heat cycle. In some breeds, there may be health benefits to waiting until your dog has reached 1 year of age before spaying or neutering.

Talk to your veterinarian about when it is best to spay or neuter your dog. They will help you make the decision that’s best for you and your pet!
### Differences between Service Dogs, Emotional Support Animals (ESAs), and Therapy Animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE DOGS</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS (ESAs)</th>
<th>THERAPY ANIMALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist a disabled individual with major life tasks.</td>
<td>Primary role is to provide psychological and emotional comfort.</td>
<td>Provide affection and comfort to people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### What tasks do they perform?
- **Service Dogs**: Work as part of a team to complete tasks such as ring a doorbell or navigating through a doorway.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: Provide companionship and unconditional affection.
- **Therapy Animals**: Assist with recovery, provide comfort, alleviate suffering, and lift spirits.

#### Where can these animals legally go?
- **Service Dogs**: They are legally allowed in any place the public is welcomed, such as planes, housing, businesses, hotels, etc., at no additional cost.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: On airplanes, in housing, and in educational institutions. They have no legal right to go in other places.
- **Therapy Animals**: Special permission must be requested, unless the facility is pet-friendly. They have no legal right to go in other places.

#### May I ask questions to confirm that the service animal is legitimate?
- **Service Dogs**: No, it is against the law. You may only ask two questions: (1) Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? (2) What task is the dog trained to perform?
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: There is no law against asking.
- **Therapy Animals**: There is no law against asking. Certain public places that aren’t pet-friendly, such as hospitals and libraries, may allow access.

#### Is special identification required?
- **Service Dogs**: No. They are not required to wear a special vest or badge.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: No. There is no official certification agency or registry.
- **Therapy Animals**: No. Depends on the requirements of the facility they are visiting.

#### What type of animals are allowed?
- **Service Dogs**: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) only recognizes dogs and in some cases miniature horses.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: All domesticated animals can serve as an ESA, such as dogs, cats, birds, reptiles, pocket pets, and miniature pigs.
- **Therapy Animals**: Typically a dog, but other animals may be used.

#### Can I pet them?
- **Service Dogs**: No. Petting or distracting these dogs can interfere with their ability to work and may pose a threat to their handler.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: No. Petting may distract the ESA.
- **Therapy Animals**: It depends on the circumstances. Always ask the handler first.

#### Have they received specialized training?
- **Service Dogs**: Yes. They have received training to perform specific tasks for their disabled handler.
- **Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)**: No specific training is required. However, they should be well-behaved.
- **Therapy Animals**: No specific training is required. They should be screened for temperament and be obedience-trained.

---

Petting Zoo Precautions

Petting zoos are great experiences for people of all ages and walks of life. They’re a fun way to get up close and personal with life on the farm, but certain precautions must be taken if the experience is to be a safe one. Following these safety measures will help keep you and your family safe!

Animals at petting zoos can make you sick. Sometimes an animal can bite, kick, step on toes, push or move into you, and trap you against fences and buildings.

Reduce Your Risk

1. Always supervise children! Watch your children, and remove them from the zoo if you are uncomfortable with the way an animal is behaving towards you or your child. Immediately notify the staff of your concerns to protect others.

2. **WASH YOUR HANDS!!!** Everyone who comes into contact with an animal must thoroughly wash their hands afterwards, before they eat, drink, or place their hands in their mouths.

3. Do not take toys, food or other important items into the petting zoo, because they may get dirty.

4. Do not prepare foods, serve foods, eat, or drink anything while visiting the petting zoo.

5. Wash all shoes and clothes after visiting the petting zoo. If there are hand and shoe-washing stations at entrances and exits, use them.

6. Only attend if you are up to date on all of your vaccinations and are feeling healthy. If you are on medication that causes your immune system to be weaker or you are not feeling well, stay home.

7. Report all injuries to employees at the petting zoo and promptly seek medical care. Thoroughly wash all bites and scratches with soap and water immediately after injury.

8. Take special care and precautions when taking children under 5 years, pregnant women, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals to petting zoos.

> Content contributed by CPT James S. Corrigan, DVM, NAS Pensacola Veterinary Services