



Hidden Holiday Hazards

Easy ways to protect your pet and your home

The holidays are fast approaching, Thanksgiving 2007 is now a memory, and before you can blink, Hanukkah, Christmas, and New Year's Eve will arrive. In the midst of dealing with holiday guests, special meals, decorations, and shopping, how do you keep your sanity – and keep your pets safe?

“Keep in mind that the holidays create a disruption in household routines and pets crave set routines. If you stop throwing the ball or taking them for their daily jog once the holidays arrive, they will look for ways to unleash their energy. And their target could be your Thanksgiving turkey or your Christmas tree.”

Stick to your daily rituals with your pet, albeit in shorter durations to keep him content and calm. He will be less likely to get into trouble.

Resist treating your pet to turkey, especially skin and bones. The fat in turkey can trigger vomiting, abdominal pain, and other problems. The bones can splinter and perforate the intestines or lodge in the esophagus, so dispose of the turkey trimmings in garbage cans with sturdy lids out of reach of your pet.

If you like to set up a Christmas tree with all the trimmings pay special heed to how close your pet stays to the tree. Tests confirm that pets can be allergic to the chemicals often put on trees and the chemicals can cause a toxic reaction in your pet's liver. Signs to watch for: eating less, dehydration, and lethargy. You may need to opt for an artificial tree or put a real tree in a room that can be blocked from entry by your pet, or surround it with decorative, pet-proof fencing. Cover the base so that your pet doesn't drink the water.

Follow these tips to keep the holidays from turning into howling times:

- ❖ Watch flickering flames. Burn candles only when you are in the room to supervise; a hardy tail wag or a paw swat can singe your pet's fur. Some pets have been known to regard hot wax as liquid and try to swallow it, causing mouth burns; this is also true for liquid potpourris.
- ❖ Serve familiar foods. Treats of turkey, ham, gravy, cookies, and other holiday goodies can lead to gastrointestinal upset in your dog or cat. Maintain their regular diet during the holidays. Alert your guests not to succumb to your pet's begging behavior by feeding him people food.
- ❖ Keep an eye on the bubbly. Alcohol and pets do not mix. Don't leave glasses unattended where your pets can get to them.
- ❖ Be aware of plant perils. Poinsettias, Christmas cactus, holly, and mistletoe berries are poisonous to pets and can cause vomiting, bloody diarrhea, and dehydration if swallowed. Keep these plants out of your house or at least out of paw's reach.
- ❖ Stash the sweets. Chocolate contains theobromine, which can cause vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, and even death if swallowed in even small amounts by your cat or dog. Our pet's ability to smell is incredible. Do not place chocolate candy within reach of animals.

- ❖ Select smart pet gifts. Fill your pet's stocking with a few toys that are big enough that they cannot be swallowed. Remove bells or squeakers from toys, and never buy a toy with string attached.
- ❖ Choose safe decorations. Avoid edible ornaments (especially stringed popcorn) and breakable ornaments. Dogs and cats can cut their paws by stepping on broken glass ornaments and require sutures. Skip the tinsel: even a slight movement of this shiny strand can be too irresistible to play-minded pets.
- ❖ Be leery of the lights. Tape light cords against the tree to make them less accessible to your chew-seeking pet. Encase tree lights in plastic conduits and, if necessary, smear the casing with petroleum jelly—a definite taste turnoff to dogs and cats.

When you are ready to decorate for the holidays, keep your pets in another room. Provide them with their favorite toys, and turn on some music to distract them. And remember: spend quality play and quiet time with your pet during the holidays. You'll both be less stressed!



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