Poisonous Plants in your Garden

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My interest in poisonous plants began with our omnivore Dalmatian, Scout. After eating several bars of soap, every vegetable she could get her paws on, a pound of yogurt covered raisins, bird seed and numerous other snacks, she discovered plants. First, it was an insatiable appetite for hibiscus flowers, and then a small round fungus that she unearthed all over the yard. These seemed to have no ill effects. Then, I planted some buckeye seeds in a pot on the patio and the next day found it overturned and the seeds gone. A quick check on the internet told me that they were poisonous. Our first call to the pet poison control line, which by the way is not free, resulted in giving Scout a few slices of bread followed by a saucer of milk with a small amount of hydrogen peroxide in it. Problem solved.

The next incident that occurred was the eating of azalea leaves. Again, a quick bit of research showed that they are poisonous. Another call to animal poison control and a trip to the vet. Hey, this is getting expensive…

I decided it was time to identify all of the poisonous plants in my yard. Some were common knowledge: elephant ears, oleander and caladiums. Others were a surprise: hydrangea flowers, boxwood, Virginia creeper, aloe and lantana. So I did a little research and focused on trees and plants that are common in the Tallahassee landscape. Sabal palms, oaks (both foliage and acorns) and red maples are among our poisonous trees.
Poisonous shrubs and vines include azalea, holly, Jessamine, laurel, cycads, heavenly bamboo, and rhododendron. Perennials include amaryllis, poinsettia, daffodil, iris, lily bulbs, bleeding heart, English ivy, wisteria and larkspur. Poisonous houseplants include peace lily, dracaena, rubber plant, dieffenbachia, philodendron and pothos. Tomato plants, rhubarb leaves and morning glory are all poisonous.

It is important to note that not all poisonous plants are created equal. Some cause only mild gastrointestinal upset, while others cause convulsions, coma, or even death. Some cause kidney or liver damage and take weeks or months to kill. Also important is the amount of plant materials that is ingested. For example, livestock generally consume greater amounts of plant material and may be more likely to have severe reactions.

This is not intended to be a complete list of poisonous plants. My intent is to encourage awareness of poisonous plants in your landscape and to provide resources for further information. You may want to check out the websites listed below. Current and potential pet owners (and parents) as well as homeowners who are selecting plants for their landscapes may want to do some additional research. It is also interesting to note that certain breeds, like Dalmatians and Labrador Retrievers are more likely to eat “inedible” items, and puppies are more likely to chew on plants, and everything else, than grown dogs are.

There are solutions other than digging up and disposing of all of your poisonous plants. Consider fencing a smaller area for your dog and planting only grass in it, or supervise him when he’s outside. If you suspect that he has nibbled on some of your landscaping, check to be sure that the plants he’s eaten aren’t poisonous. Also, make sure that your pet is getting enough nutritious food. Hunger can drive a pet to eat something it would normally not think of as food. Although, in the case of the Dalmatian who never gets enough to eat, that didn’t help.

Helpful websites include:
http://www.aspca.org/
http://www.anisci.cornell.edu/plants/
http://www.vth.colostate.edu/poisonous_plants/
http://plantanswers.tamu.edu/

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