

Caution With Dogs and Holiday Plants

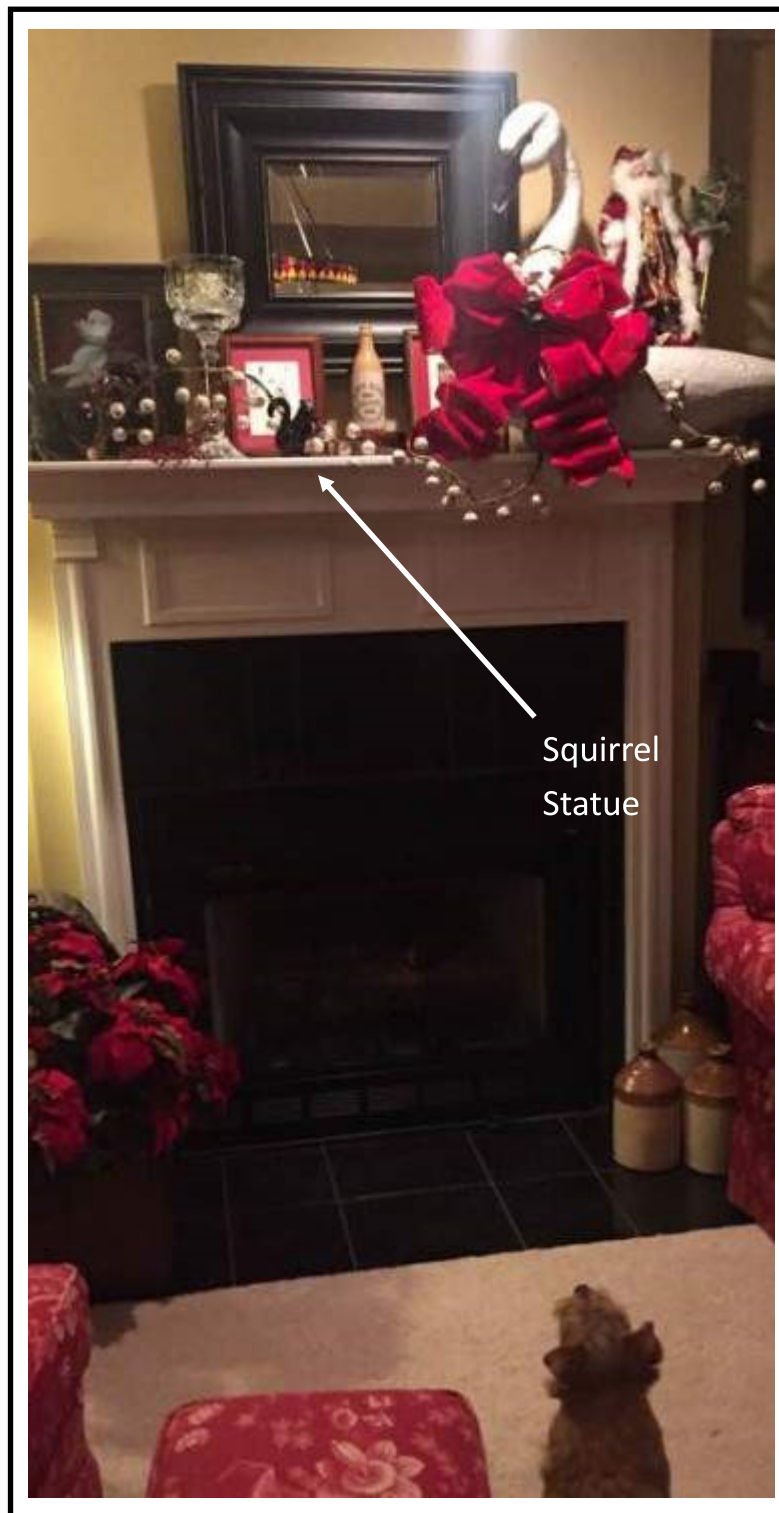
By Ken Slump

Most of us have heard that the colorful poinsettia is a poisonous plant. The milky sap of the plant can cause nausea and vomiting in dogs if ingested but it is likely not as toxic as many believe. If your pup only takes a nibble, he will likely be fine, but there is justifiable reason for concern if the plant is consumed in large quantities. Potentially more serious are the toxins found in the berries of holly that can lead to digestive distress, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Amaryllis is another toxic holiday plant. All parts are dangerous, but particularly the bulb. Similarly to the other plants, drooling, vomiting, and abdominal pain are the primary symptoms. A different danger is posed by mistletoe. Dogs that ingest it may experience breathing problems, erratic behavior, and a drop in blood pressure. At high levels its toxins can cause seizures and potentially death.

A few dog owners I have known in Florida have experienced an unusual plant-related calamity that most of us would not anticipate. After bringing fresh Christmas trees into their homes they received the unexpected gift of tick infestations. It seems the critters were dormant on the fresh cut trees and were more than happy to move into the baseboards and crevices of their new, warm environments. This seems to be related to the source of the trees that are shipped to South Florida, as I have not heard of the problem elsewhere, but it bears consideration as my friends who have dealt with it have found the ticks very difficult to eradicate.

The likelihood of your dog poisoning itself from your holiday plants is admittedly small. Most dogs are not drawn to these plants, but puppies often have the habit of tasting just about anything they find so they may need to be monitored. Placing these plants well out of reach is advised. If your dog behaves unusually and you suspect a problem from a toxic plant encounter, contact your veterinarian immediately.



Squirrel
Statue

Article Content Approved by Marian Shaw, DVM

*Twas the night before Christmas,
And all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring,
Not even a . . . Wait! Is that a squirrel?*