



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Pet safety during the holidays

With the hustle and bustle of the holidays approaching, it's easy to overlook your pets and how they might react to all the new holiday decorations, food and foliage.

When it comes to the tantalizing new decorations and increased activity around the house, remember to think like your furry friend. Your curious cat or rambunctious dog is like a human kid in a layer of fur when it comes to their curiosity level about holiday lights, decorations, wrapped presents, and the aroma of holiday cookies baking.

Holiday decorations are meant to spark wonder, curiosity, and delight — which for pets spells trouble!

The holidays should be a happy time for you and your furry friend, not a time for an emergency visit to your veterinarian. With some planning and a little training, you can make things more festive for Rover and Kitty and less stressful for you. Keep in mind that pets are sensitive to changes in their environment and routines. Especially around the holidays when family members take off from school, houseguests come to stay, or other visitors roll through the house in droves.

You need to stick as closely as possible to your

pet's routines — regular meal schedules, walks and play sessions.

Remember, dogs have an exceptional sense of smell, so keep an eye on the holiday table and secure leftovers and garbage to prevent your pet from foraging among the holiday foods. Turkey bones left over from your holiday dinner can pose a choking hazard for pets.

Lean meat like turkey is fine to treat Rover with, but watch out for rich, fatty foods like ham, gravy, or grease, which can cause problems ranging from stomach upsets to pancreatitis.

Keep your dog away from nuts, especially almonds, walnuts, and pistachios, they can cause stomach upset. Macadamia nuts can be toxic to dogs!

Chocolate is also a problem, because dogs love its flavor. Problems from ingesting chocolate range from diarrhea to seizures and death. And beware of raisins, grapes and onions, which are all toxic to pets.

If you don't want to leave Rover or kitty out, indulge them with a special dog or cat treat stuffed in a food-carrier toy, such as Kong.

There's nothing like a real Christmas tree during the holidays. The pine fragrance is so appealing. Your furry friends think so, too. Christmas trees are mildly toxic. Fir-tree oils can be irritating to the mouth and stomach. Both live and artificial tree needles are sharp and indigestible.

And before you deck the halls with boughs of holly, think twice. Holly is poisonous to cats and dogs. Bright ornamental plants are a great way to dress up the house during the holidays but keep holly, mistletoe, poinsettia, and any forms of lily out of your pet's reach.

Puppies and kittens may want to jump up on your fresh-smelling tree; after all you've brought the outdoors

inside for them. Before decorating your holiday tree try to secure it to the wall or ceiling so it doesn't tip and fall, causing injury to your pet.

Unfortunately, some dogs, especially puppies, like to chew on electrical cords, which can lead to electrical shock, burns, or possible death. So, check your holiday lights frequently for any signs of chewing. And turn the lights off and unplug them when you are not home.

Those stunning Christmas ornaments, sparkling icicles, and shiny garland may look pretty, but they can be a source of danger to your curious pet. When decorating your tree with lights keep them at the top of the tree, away from Rover and Kitty.

Part of the fun of Christmas is to place beautifully wrapped gifts covered with bows and ribbons under the tree. But your curious furry friend may decide your gifts could make great chew toys, which could pose a choking hazard or end up obstructing the intestines.

Don't use edible ornaments, or cranberry or popcorn strings. Your pet may try to knock the tree down in an attempt to reach them. Your furry friend may enjoy

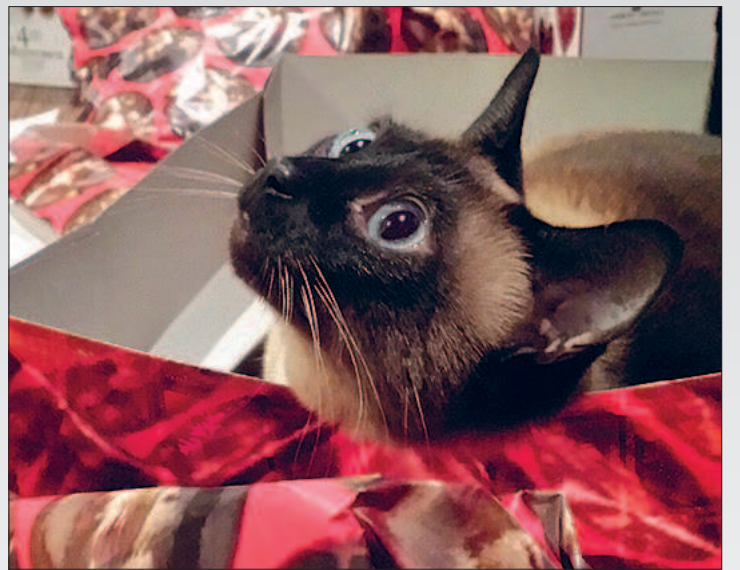


PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

No ribbons on presents for Tinkerbell; she will chew and eat them.

playing with your ornaments that they can reach, so keep ornaments off the lower branches.

Nowhere does the average family dog get into so much trouble as at the front door! Guests do have to knock to be known, and your dog just might love to door-dash with over-the-top excitement. If you haven't had time to train for all the comings and goings at the door, it's always good practice to either have your furry friend crated or provided with a quiet place to retreat during the festivities. Make

sure Rover has his own safe area with fresh water, a few treats, and toys.

So now you can relax and enjoy the festivities of the holiday knowing that you're taking good care of your furry friend. Once you know the hazards, a little care and precaution will go a long way to keep the holidays a safe and happy time for everyone.

If you think your pet has come into contact with something poisonous, contact your veterinarian immediately or call the Pet Poison Helpline at 1-800-213-6680.

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