

Valentine's Day treats a threat to pets

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Remember your pets when buying gifts for Valentine's Day.

Valentine's Day traditions — like chocolate and most flowers — can be fatal to cats, dogs and other pets. Veterinary nurse Tabitha Owens of The Cat Practice in Birmingham said pet owners need to consider safe alternatives when considering romantic gifts. Here are some suggestions:

Candy

- Both dark and milk chocolate can be fatal to pets, especially baker's chocolate. Instead of dark or milk chocolate, consider white chocolate, which is much less likely to cause a problem.
- If you must have chocolate in the house, make sure it's kept out of reach. And don't assume plastic wrap is enough to keep a curious kitty or pup from taking a nibble.
- Sugar-free candies contain xylitol, which is dangerous if ingested. If your valentine cannot have candy for health reasons, consider lovely baskets of dried fruits, fresh fruits or nuts.

Flowers

- Lilies, tulips, carnations and baby's breath are all toxic for pets. For cats, even brushing up against a lily flower can be fatal. Instead of fresh flowers, consider a silk bouquet.
- If fresh flowers are a must, ask the florist for a pet-friendly bouquet by substituting baby's breath with greenery such as ferns. Use non-toxic blooms like roses, orchids, snapdragons, African violets, African daisies or begonias.

Gift wrap

- Synthetic ribbons often get chewed up and can get lodged in your pet's throat or digestive tract. Instead, consider a cute gift bag with light tissue paper rather than decorative grass or ribbon.
- Instead of traditional synthetic wrapping paper, choose natural paper wrapping paper.

If you suspect your pet has consumed something toxic, take them to the veterinarian right away.

“If your pet is not acting quite right, not eating or appears lethargic, it's time to get to the veterinarian,” Owens said. “Pets often mask their illness. So by the time they start showing symptoms, they are really sick or it may be too late.”

The Cat Practice, located at 875 Worth, is a cats-only veterinary hospital that's open seven days a week and evenings.

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