

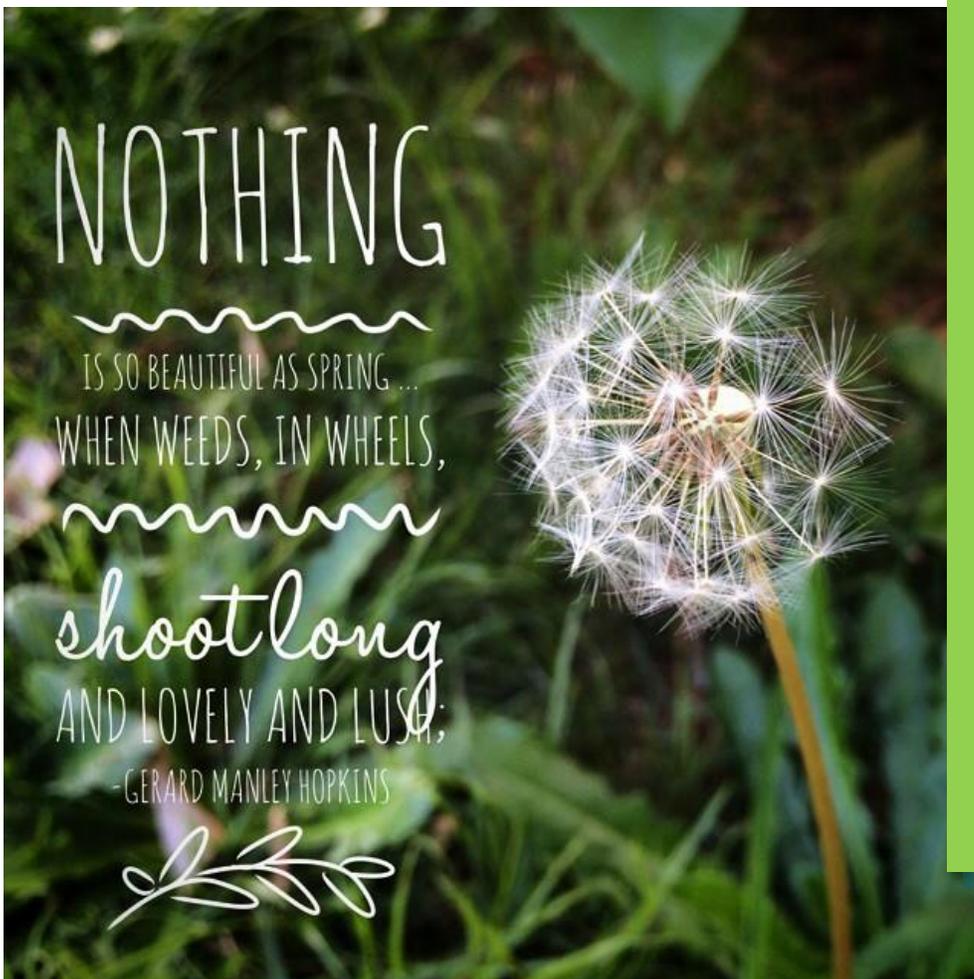
PET GAZETTE

**Lakewood
Animal
Hospital**

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How to Help Your Pet with Allergies

By Morieka Johnson, MNN.com

Spring is just around the corner -- a time when many of us simply dust off the neti pot or load up on Benadryl in preparation for allergy season. It's a little harder for dogs and cats with environmental allergies to avoid the elements. Fortunately, our experts offer cool tips to help keep hot spots and other problems at bay during allergy season.



Watch for allergy symptoms

Itchy pets are hard to ignore. "We'll hear owners say 'they kept me up all night because every five minutes they were chewing, chewing, chewing,'" said Dr. Andrea Dunnings, owner of East Atlanta Animal Clinic, who notes an increase in pets with skin allergies this time of the year. Allergy symptoms in dogs can include excessive licking, redness ("hot spots") or hair loss. Dr. Drew Weigner, a board-certified feline veterinary specialist and owner of The Cat Doctor in Atlanta, says that few cats actually suffer from seasonal allergies; they simply sneeze more due to physical irritation from pollen. But cats with true allergies will typically show signs of hair loss and have scabs or open sores. Discharge in a cat's ears or excessive scratching also are common symptoms.

Monitor the pollen count

Allergy season for dogs and cats can mirror that of humans, so bookmark the pollen forecast in your area and monitor your pets for symptoms. After tiptoeing through the tulips, Dr. Robert O. Schick, a dermatologist with Georgia Veterinary Specialists, suggests wiping your dogs' paws with a cool towel to remove pollen residue or scheduling a weekly cool water bath. Also, help all the animals (and humans) in your house and avoid tracking pollen into the house by removing your shoes at the door.

Don't ignore household allergens

"The most common environmental allergen is not a pollen but house dust mites and house dust," said Schick. Do what you can to reduce the amount of dust in your home by vacuuming carpets well. Focus on your pet's favorite spots in the house such as under beds and near windows. Don't forget to clean window treatments regularly. Dunnings also suggests removing bedding and washing it on a regular basis using a gentle detergent that is free of dyes or perfumes. Schick offered another cool tip: When your cat isn't looking, ice the mouse every now and then. Freezing plush toys kills dust mites. Also, "Google 'mite control' and you will find several powders that you can add to the carpet to remove mites," he said.

Call the vet before raiding the medicine cabinet

"Not all over-the-counter medications are safe for use of pets," Dunnings said, noting that many dog owners use Benadryl to help relieve some of the itching and scratching. The antihistamine "typically makes the pet kind of drowsy, reducing itching because they are sleepier," she said. But it's easy to miscalculate the appropriate dosage for Chihuahua versus a Great Dane. "At least call the clinic prior to dispensing," Dunnings warned.

Topical solutions provide limited relief

Victoria Park, owner of Park Pet Supply, sees her share of frazzled dog owners in search of help this time of the year. She has found success with all-natural products that are free of parabens and phthalates. Creams that contain hydrocortisone and oatmeal-based shampoos also can help relieve itching, Dunnings said. For cat owners, it's not that simple. Dr. William Carlson of InTown Animal Hospital in Atlanta said soap-free allergy shampoo and cool water can relieve symptoms by reducing pollen and mold spore counts on the cat's skin. But that means getting a cat into a tub, which may be the hardest task of all.

There is no quick fix

Identifying and treating the source of an allergy can be tricky, said Dunnings. That's why skin allergies and infections ranked second and third, respectively, last year among dog insurance claims submitted to VPI, the largest pet insurance company in the country. "Allergies aren't going to be cured, they will be treated long-term," she warned. "Think of friends

who are always on some type of antihistamine or inhaler." An intradermal skin test (allergy test) will help your vet determine the cause of your pet's symptoms. The test is usually conducted by a veterinary dermatologist, and involves shaving a patch on the skin and injecting various allergens such as grass, pollen or dust. Through process of elimination, the vet can isolate the allergen and plan a course of action such as allergy shots or a vaccine. Keep in mind, treatment can be costly -- the test alone may cost more than \$200.

"Their immune systems can change and they can grow out of the allergy," Dunnings said. "But a lot of dogs have yearly lifetime issues." In cats, regular steroid injections can safely and effectively relieve symptoms, said Weigner. But he noted that potentially serious side effects make this option the least desirable form of treatment. Another option is prescribing an oral medication called Atopica. "It works by suppressing helper T-cells, thus reducing inflammation," Carlson said. "It has clinically been shown to be safe and very effective."

Maintain monthly flea and tick treatment

One flea can wreak plenty of havoc, so maintain your pet's monthly flea and tick treatment, especially if there is a chance your animal is allergic. Topical solutions such as Advantage and Frontline are popular because you simply apply a liquid solution once a month. Reports of adverse reactions from topical flea solutions caused the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to pursue more stringent testing and evaluation requirements as well as stronger warning labels. If you are squeamish about topical solutions, consider greener options. Park suggests Natural Chemistry's DeFlea products, which contain a surfactant ("detergent") that dissolve fleas' waxy protective coating. She also recommends essential oils or diatomaceous earth -- a mineral-based pesticide that comes from fossilized water plants.

Pick another protein

If your pet appears itchy long after the last flower has bloomed, it may be time to focus on the food. Pets can be allergic to grains, proteins or even preservatives, and the symptoms resemble symptoms for environmental allergies. To address the problem in your dog, your vet may suggest a food trial, limiting the dog to a novel protein such as duck, venison or even fish, along with a vegetable. Treats and table food will be off limits until the vet can determine the allergy source. Over time, you can reintroduce your pet to other proteins, using the process of elimination to determine the source. Take an active approach to food issues by investing in a quality dog food that lists its protein among the first few ingredients. Cat owners have one more option: Omega-3 fatty acid supplements can keep the normal immune barrier of the skin healthy and reduce secondary infections, Carlson said. Of course, cats won't mind getting their omega-3 in the form of coldwater fish such as salmon, trout and sardines either.

Morieka Johnson writes about pets, fashion and money-saving ideas for MNN.com. You can follow her on Twitter @MotherNatureNet.
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DID YOU KNOW?

CATS WIN THE POPULARITY CONTEST. THERE ARE 88 MILLION PET CATS IN THE USA, COMPARED WITH 74 MILLION DOGS.

RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT CHILDREN WHO LIVE WITH A PET BEFORE THE AGE OF ONE MAY BE LESS LIKELY TO DEVELOP PET ALLERGIES LATER ON.



5 Facts About Heartworm Disease

The American Heartworm Society (AHS) recommends annual heartworm testing and year-round heartworm prevention. Here are five reasons why:

1 More than a million pets in the U.S. have heartworm disease. A look at the AHS heartworm incidence map* reveals that in most veterinary clinics in the U.S., a minimum of 1-5 heartworm cases per clinic were diagnosed in 2013, while numerous regions reported 100 cases per clinic or more. These reports do *not* reflect the status of the millions of dogs and cats that aren't regularly seen by a veterinarian or tested for heartworm.

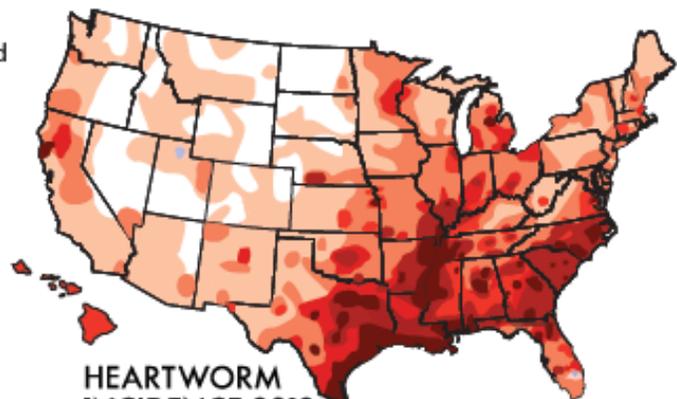
2 Heartworm disease has been diagnosed in all 50 states. Heartworms are spread by mosquitoes. While heartworm disease tends to be associated with regions that have warm, humid weather and high counts of pesky bloodsuckers, heartworm infection is widespread in most states of the country, including states like California and Arizona where the disease was once considered rare, thanks to dog mobility and the variety of mosquitoes that carry heartworm.

3 Both dogs and cats get heartworm disease. In dogs, adult heartworms that develop from heartworm larvae deposited by mosquitoes cause disease. Cats can also harbor adult heartworms, but it is more common in cats for heartworms to die before reaching maturity. However, even immature worms can cause respiratory disease in cats.

4 Heartworm disease can be fatal. Heartworm disease affects the heart, lungs and pulmonary blood vessels of pets and can be fatal to both dogs and cats. Annual testing and monitoring is important, because infected dogs can be successfully treated, and the earlier the better. There are no approved treatments for cats, but supportive care can help manage complications.

5 Prevention is safe, effective and cost-effective. The American Heartworm Society recommends year-round prevention for dogs and cats in the U.S., even in regions that experience cold winters. Heartworm preventives work retroactively, so an animal that acquires an infection one month must be given heartworm preventives in the months that follow to be protected. And with unpredictable weather patterns and the ability of hardy mosquitoes to survive in protected areas—as well as indoors—it's difficult to predict when heartworms aren't in season.

Fortunately, heartworm prevention is highly effective when given faithfully, and the year-round cost of preventing the disease in dogs is a small fraction of the cost of heartworm treatment.



HEARTWORM INCIDENCE 2013

Average number of cases per reporting clinic



© American Heartworm Society
The severity of heartworm incidence as shown in this map is based on the average number of cases in dogs and cats from reporting clinics in 2013. Some remote regions of the United States lack veterinary clinics; therefore, we have no reported cases in these areas.

*The 2013 American Heartworm Society Heartworm Data is based on a survey of heartworm testing results from more than 4,500 veterinary clinics and shelters across the U.S.



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Top 10 Plants Poisonous to Pets

From www.PetPoisonHelpline.com

Autumn Crocus



There are two Crocus plants: one that blooms in the spring (Crocus species) and the other in the autumn (*Colchicum autumnale*). The spring plants are more common and are part of the Iridaceae family. These ingestions can cause general gastrointestinal upset including vomiting and diarrhea. These should not be mistaken for Autumn Crocus, part of the Liliaceae family, which contain colchicine. The Autumn Crocus is highly toxic and can cause severe vomiting, gastrointestinal bleeding, liver and kidney damage, and respiratory failure. If you're not sure what plant it is, bring your pet to their veterinarian immediately for care. Signs may be seen immediately but can be delayed for days.

Azalea



In the same family as rhododendrons, azaleas can have serious effects on pets. Eating even a few leaves can result in vomiting, diarrhea and excessive drooling; without immediate veterinary attention, the pet could fall into a coma and possibly die.

Cyclamen



The roots of this seasonal flowering plant are especially dangerous to pets. If ingested, cyclamen can cause severe vomiting and even death.

Kalanchoe



This popular flowering succulent plant can cause vomiting, diarrhea and heart arrhythmias if ingested by pets.

Lilies



There are dangerous and benign lilies out there, and it's important to know the difference. Peace, Peruvian, and Calla lilies contain oxalate crystals that cause minor signs, such as tissue irritation to the mouth, tongue, pharynx, and esophagus – this results in minor drooling. The more dangerous, potentially fatal lilies are true lilies, and these include Tiger, Day, Asiatic, Easter and Japanese Show lilies – all of which are highly toxic to cats! Even small ingestions (such as 2-3 petals or leaves) can result in severe kidney failure. If your cat is seen consuming any part of a lily, bring your cat (and the plant) immediately to a veterinarian for medical care. The sooner you bring in your cat, the better and more

efficiently we can treat the poisoning. Decontamination (like inducing vomiting and giving binders like activated charcoal) are imperative in the early toxic stage, while aggressive intravenous fluid therapy, kidney function monitoring tests, and supportive care can greatly improve the prognosis.

Oleander



Oleander is an outdoor shrub, popular for its evergreen qualities and delicate flowers. However, the leaves and flowers are extremely toxic if ingested and can cause severe vomiting, slow the heart rate and possibly even cause death.

Dieffenbachia



Popular in many homes and offices, dieffenbachia can cause intense oral irritation, drooling, nausea, vomiting and difficulty swallowing if ingested.

Daffodils



These flowers contain lycorine, an alkaloid with strong emetic properties (something that triggers vomiting). Ingestion of the bulb, plant or flower can cause severe vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and even possible cardiac arrhythmias or respiratory depression. Crystals are found in the outer layer of the bulbs, similar to hyacinths, which cause severe tissue irritation and secondary drooling. Daffodil ingestions can result in more severe symptoms so if an exposure is witnessed or symptoms are seen, we recommend seeking veterinary care for further supportive care.

Lily of the Valley



The *Convallaria majalis* plant contains cardiac glycosides which will cause symptoms similar to digitalis (foxglove) ingestion. These symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, a drop in heart rate, severe cardiac arrhythmias, and possibly seizures. Pets with any known exposure to this plant should be examined and evaluated by a veterinarian and treated symptomatically.

Sago Palm



Very popular in warmer climates, this household and outdoor plant can be very harmful to pets. If ingested, the leaves and seeds can cause vomiting, bloody stools, damage to the stomach lining, severe liver failure and, in some cases, death.

Tulips and Hyacinths



Tulips contain allergenic lactones while hyacinths contain similar alkaloids. The toxic principle of these plants is very concentrated in the bulbs (versus the leaf or flower), so make sure your dog isn't digging up the bulbs in the garden. When the plant parts or bulbs are chewed or ingested, it can result in tissue irritation to the mouth and esophagus. Typical signs include profuse drooling, vomiting, or even diarrhea, depending on the amount consumed. There's no specific antidote, but with supportive care from the veterinarian (including rinsing the mouth, anti-vomiting medication, and possibly subcutaneous fluids), animals do quite well. With large ingestions of the bulb, more severe symptoms such as an increase in heart rate and changes in respiration can be seen, and should be treated by a veterinarian. These more severe signs are seen in cattle or our overzealous, chowhound Labradors.



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