



Lawn Alert

Is your backyard a safe haven or a health hazard? Lawn chemicals, fences and mowers all spell danger for dogs.

Your backyard, with its colorful burst of flowers, chirping birds and sunny disposition, may seem like a perfect springtime retreat. But it can be a big, bad world to your pet. Everything from lawn chemicals to the fence around your private sanctuary can be dangerous to your dog.

So what's a pet owner to do? Obviously, keeping your dog cooped up inside isn't the answer. But taking a few precautions will let you both enjoy the great outdoors safely.

"Owning a dog is like having a 3-year-old," says Dr. Patricia Talcott, a veterinary toxicologist at the University of Washington College of Veterinarian Medicine. "You don't throw out Tylenol® because of children. You store it safely. It's the same with a dog in your yard."

Danger Ahead

Whether your yard is the envy or the laughingstock of the neighborhood, it has hidden dangers. For example:

- **Chemicals.** If used properly, most chemicals pose little risk. An exception is 2,4-D. The diethylamine salt in this weed killer can cause serious health problems in dogs. (Agent Orange used in Vietnam contained 50 percent 2, 4-D.) Rodent and insect repellents also are problematic, usually because people forget they've applied them.
- **Plants.** The list of plants toxic to dogs includes yew, rhododendron and tulip and daffodil bulbs. Check with a nursery if you're wondering about your plants. If you do indeed have the plants above, remove them or prevent access to them.
- **Equipment.** Moving objects are enticing to dogs, which is why lawn mowers, weed trimmers, chain saws and similar equipment are off limits. Keep dogs away from hot barbecue grills, too. (They love those meaty smells!)
- **Fences.** Although they provide a barrier to the outside world, collars can get hooked in sharp-edged chain-link fences, and wooden fences can give splinters. A break-away collar would be the answer here. Unless fences are tall, some dogs can jump over them.

Play It Safe

Creating a safe haven isn't as hard as you might think. View your yard through your dog's eyes. Is he a digger? Add pavers at the base of your fence. Does he like to chew? A chew toy will keep him from plants.

Like Talcott, Michael Kaufmann, Director of Educational Programs for the American Humane Association in Washington, D.C., says to act like a parent. "You wouldn't just lock your toddler in the yard and run to the store," he says. "The best way to avoid trouble is to not leave your dog unsupervised in the yard."

