



# THE SOUTHTOWNS JOURNAL

A Quarterly Newsletter

Prepared by the staff of the Southtowns Animal Hospital

Newman, Editor-in-Chief

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## Beware of Poisonous Plants During the Holidays

With the holiday season fast approaching, take a few moments to evaluate the decorative plants you have around the house. Many of our favorite Christmas flowers are toxic to animals, and many that are safe can be sprayed with fertilizers and preservatives which can harm our friends.

The first holiday flower that usually comes to mind is the ever-present Poinsettia. This plant has been recently removed from the toxic plant lists, but we still hear reports of animals (and people, for that matter) who experience symptoms after ingesting Poinsettias, so it is our advice to keep these plants out of reach of your pets, or use silk flowers in your holiday decorating.

Another blooming plant which has been gaining popularity during the holiday season is the Amaryllis, a very showy flower which is grown from a bulb. All parts of this plant are toxic, and the most common symptoms are vomiting and diarrhea. The severity of symptoms vary from case to case depending on the amount ingested. Depending on growing conditions and the variety of the flower, the toxicity of amaryllis varies from plant to plant. The flower your dog munched on with no problems last year, can be vastly different than the one you grow this year.

Mistletoe is a very toxic parasitic plant that should not be in the home of any pet owner. Preserved, dried mistletoe is often sold in stores, and it looks like it is artificial. BEWARE! read all packaging.

Every part of mistletoe is poisonous. The drying process concentrates the toxic principles of the plant. Signs of mistletoe poisoning include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, coma and seizures. Mistletoe is an abortifacient, and can cause miscarriage in humans and animals.

If you think your pet ingested a toxic plant, or if you are not sure the plant is poisonous, quick action is needed. Call us immediately if you see your pet munching on a plant. Identifying the plant is crucial. Common names are not helpful; for example: the amaryllis is often called a Christmas Lily. However, not all lilies are poisonous, and toxic lilies have different symptoms and treatment than amaryllis poisoning. Most plants have pot markers which will identify the plant's Latin name, and this is very helpful. If you can't identify the plant, bring it with you.

The ASPCA operates a National Animal Poison Control Center to help us with cases of animal poisoning. Their fee is expensive, and in addition to other treatment, so it is in the best interest of your pets to keep potentially dangerous plants out of the house or at least out of their reach.

Ask nursery or garden center staff about the potential danger to your pet before you purchase holiday plants. Make this season a safe one for all the furry and



## Happy Holidays from Doctor Winkle

Greetings to one and all! Often at this festive time of year our thoughts turn to giving and receiving. I thought I would share with you some of the "gifts" and "toys" we got



for the hospital so we can serve you, and your pets, better.

First, to keep us and all our furry friends warm and dry we put a new roof on the hospital this spring. To the delight of our client relations team, we installed a new telephone system, and along the same lines, an updated fax machine. We also added something we hope you won't hear much: a new on hold information service.

On the medical side, we added a new dental work station, which along with our dental x-ray unit has our staff excited about February Dental Health Month. For our surgical patient we have added a third anesthetic machine to the surgical suite. We are also looking into adding a blood pressure monitor to our lineup of diagnostic tools.

We like to think of the presents we get for the hospital as gifts for the care and well-being of your pets.

## DOCTOR WINKLE AND CREW ATTEND VETERINARY CONFERENCE IN DALLAS

Representatives of the nursing, technical and reception staff joined Dr. Ted Winkle in attending a four day conference on veterinary practice education in Dallas, Texas last month. Most of each day they were attending lectures, meeting with the personnel of other animal hospitals, and learning how to serve your pets better.

After the Saturday sessions, we did manage to squeeze in some sightseeing; visiting the Dallas Aquarium and Dealy Plaza, the site of President Kennedy's



## Why Animals Do Not Make Good Holiday Gifts

It's a Norman Rockwell moment: in the soft glow of the lights, that box with the big red bow wobbles; a child's eyes shine as he lifts the lid (punched with air-holes) and beholds his new companion for life. He promises faithfully to walk him, feed him, brush him, even (gasp) clean up his poop. The new pet wobbles on baby feet, the cameras flash -- preserving this scene forever.

That, dear readers, is usually the last happy moment of the new pet's holiday. As soon as the shutter clicks, the puppy pees, the kitten takes a fright and swarms up the tree, the new bird flies straight into the menorah, or the new bunny chews through the wires of Dad's brand new speakers.

Even if luck is with you, as the season of joy wears on, the stress on the new animal is considerable. Hordes of relatives descend on the new family member, petting pawing, offering inappropriate food items like candy canes and turkey bones.

Adopting an animal into your home is a big step, and everyone should be prepared. The new animal needs quiet to adjust to his new surroundings. Young animals miss their mothers and need time to explore the new home. It is easier to house train a pet when he is not distracted by all the holiday activity.

If you want that moment of joy on the big day, do not give the animal. Give supplies, or wrap up a big book about the kind of animal you want. Let the anticipation of fun to come hold you through the holiday season and only when the hustle is over, add the pet.

*Dear Newman,  
Why is the Veterinarian so concerned with my poop? He has seen it every year since I was a kitten. My owners won't let me outside.  
--Concerned Kitty in Cheektowaga*

Dear Concerned,

Vets do seem to be concerned with our backsides, don't they? Checking poop regularly lets us check for a number of reasons. The most common check the docs do is for intestinal parasites. Worms can produce hundreds of thousands of microscopic eggs. The vet mixes your poop with a special solution that causes the eggs to float to the top of a container where they are collected and identified by your friendly Veterinary Technician. Indoor kitties like you can become infected by contacting people or objects contaminated by dirt or feces from outside. Consuming mice or fleas can also cause an infection, as these species serve as intermed-

iate hosts for some tapeworms.

Clues to other diseases can also show up in stool samples, conditions such as pancreatic problems, which produce clay colored stools with a high fat content, colitis, and constipation. We can even detect certain skin problems if we find large amounts of hair in the stool.

As you can see, poop analysis can be a valuable tool in monitoring the health and well-being of us kitties! It can also protect our human friends, especially children, that can become infected by parasites that prefer kitties (who wouldn't) but have to settle for second best.

I'm considering charging the doctors a small fee (tuna fish) for my next sample. I'll let you know how it comes out (no pun intended!) **TUNA RULES!**

--Newman



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## February Is Dental Health Month. Your Pets Need Dental Care too!



When you bring your pet in for her annual visit, one of the first things we do is look into her mouth. We then usually ask if you ever brush your pet's teeth. The response of the average dog or cat owner is: "You're kidding, right?"

No, we're not kidding. Companion animals are plagued with dental problems. Their diet of prepared foods is far removed from that of their wild ancestors. They don't need to hunt prey and gnaw the meat off bones (in fact, bone gnawing is dangerous) to survive.

Soft, chewy dog and cat snacks contain simple carbohydrates and sugars which make them yummy, but they adhere to an animal's teeth like taffy sticks to ours, and those sticky sugars are a resort hotel for bacteria, and those bacteria make acids which, over time, can destroy teeth and gums..

If you begin when your pet is young, you can train her to accept a daily tooth scrubbing. Older pets can be resistant, but patience and persistence pay off. We have a wide range of dental care

products like chicken-flavored toothpaste and enzymatic chews here at Southtowns Animal Hospital and we can instruct you in their use.

Older animals that already have mouth problems should be attended to as soon as the problems are noticed. Bacteria and plaque can harden on your pet's teeth forming tartar, which cannot be removed by brushing. Only professional cleaning can get rid of the encrustations. Tartar at the gumline also causes gingivitis, a painful mouth infection. Bad breath, tooth loss, abscesses, and even heart and kidney disease will result if these conditions are ignored for long enough, so as you can see having us clean your pet's teeth can save her a lot of discomfort later on.

Call us to make an appointment for dental work at 824-4108.



# THE WELL-HEELED DOG

## or, A Beginner's Guide to A Properly Socialized Pet Canine, PART TWO

***This is the second article in a three-part series on dog socialization. In this issue we will discuss adolescent and adult dogs.***

Dogs between the ages of eight months and two years are the ones most often surrendered to animal shelters. In only eighteen months the average dog has achieved the same degree of growth and development as a sixteen year old human. Dogs in this age range are extremely energetic, and if not channeled properly, this energy can lead to difficulties.

Adolescent dogs need firm, consistent training. Every member of the household must give the same commands for any behavior modification to be useful. Energetic dogs, particularly those of the working breeds, benefit from being given a "job" to do. For example, retrievers were bred to spend long hours in wet, marshy areas swimming and retrieving ducks. You may never go hunting, but your retriever wants to do something. Teach him to catch and retrieve Frisbees, enroll in an agility class, go jogging, anything to let him use his mind and body.

Often, once a large-breed dog reaches young adulthood, his weight and strength become too much for his owners, particularly children to handle. The dog strains at the lead, chokes himself, and drags his human down the road. What could have been a pleasant walk becomes a chore, and the dog is no longer walked, he is let out in the yard instead. However, "yard" dogs rarely exercise. The yard is familiar, and the dog would much rather be with his pack members. In addition to continued obedience training Gentle Leader Promise Collars can help control a strong, unruly dog. We will discuss the use of a Promise Collar in our next article, but if you are interested feel free to call the hospital.

Sadly, the unruly adolescent dog is frequently lacking in affection. He is labeled "hyper". He is so excited at the prospect of playing with the other members of his pack that he is wild, jumpy, and

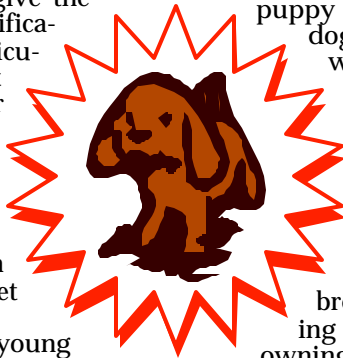
uncontrollable. No longer a plump and cuddly puppy, he is pushed away and scolded for his enthusiasm. Dogs should be approached when calm, stroked and petted while relaxed. This will reinforce the good behavior. Excited dogs should be given the one word command "Down!" and promptly ignored. As soon as the dog is quiet again, he may be approached. This is not a quick-fix, but a permanent solution.

Family members should not be allowed to rile up the dog and encourage it to rough play. Children and men in particular like to pretend slap around a dogs face, and the dog plays, but while this is a cute puppy behavior, it can be dangerous in a large dog, who can hurt someone by playing this way. Keep in mind too, that the longer this kind of behavior is allowed and encouraged, the more difficult it will be to change.

Tugging games are also to be discouraged, as they reinforce dominant behavior in the dog. Every time the dog wins the game he takes a step towards being the pack leader--not you. Toy breeds are particularly vulnerable to becoming top dog in a human based pack. People owning large dogs are typically more careful in not encouraging the dominance of the dog, but toy dogs are not perceived to be threatening because they are so small.

In terms of behavior, breed is no guarantee of temperament, and we can't stress that enough. We see a recurring difficulty when someone loses a pet and gets another dog of the same breed, expecting it to be as easy to train. In some cases the perception of the new dog being "difficult" is merely the sudden contrast of the old, sedate pet with an energetic young one, but many times there personalities of the two dogs are in sharp contrast. This can cause the owner much distress.

Dogs, like people, have strengths and weaknesses. It is our duty as pet owners to reward the good things our pets do and discourage the bad. In general, what you get out of your pet depends on the time and



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The snow falls softly without. Inside the little ones wait with eager anticipation. It is almost time for that ultimate season; that glorious day: the day when the humans bring in the giant light-up cat playground. We may call it a Christmas Tree. All they see are ornaments to bat around the front hallway, wires to chew and tinsel to eat, not to mention playing Godzilla and crashing through the ceramic village like it was downtown Tokyo.

It is hard to keep cats away from the tree, so keep safety in mind. Long silver icicles are an absolute no-no. These can cause obstructions of the bowel. Try to keep fragile glass ornaments near the top of the tree, or do not use them at all. Cats that like to chew wires should be kept away from the tree and windows for the duration of the season or keep loose wires taped down. A bitter paste or spray is available for which may be applied to the wires to discourage chewing, but not all cats dislike the taste. Christmas trees should be anchored to the wall in case Fluffy takes a notion to examine the star at close range.

If you are sneaky, your cats can be discouraged from visiting the tree by squirting them with a spray bottle if they get too close. The cat can't associate the water with you. You have to squirt him so that he thinks the water came from the tree, otherwise he will want to play "can't squirt me" and I can bat the ornament before you find the bottle" There are also repellents which can I help. Shaking a loud rattle when the cat is near the tree is helpful in many cases.



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Happy Holidays To All  
the Animals We Love  
And All The People Who  
Love Them!



We love to treat your pets!