

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

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Handyman Jim Hurley moving home theater read on Page D4

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Plants, pets, and poisons



Colorful African daisies.

Photos Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

“Flowers have an expression of countenance as much as men or animals. Some seem to smile, some have a sad expression, some are pensive and diffident, others again are plain, honest, and upright.” ~ Henry Ward Beecher

And may I add ... some are very poisonous!

Since I was a child growing up on a farm, I have adopted and raised every type of creature, both domesticated and wild. Dogs, cats, rabbits, squirrels, chickens, ducks, geese, cows, horses, sheep, ponies, deer, birds, pigs, goats and more roamed our barnyards. My family never allowed indoor pets, yet many of our animal friends followed us around our expansive gardens as we did our chores, sometimes nibbling on roses or gnawing on low voltage wires, but never getting sick. It seemed that our animals had an innate knowledge of what plant was poisonous and they stayed clear of the oleander, digitalis, hemlock, and hundreds of other



Blue plumbago is eye-catching and safe for pets in the garden.

toxic specimens.

Recently I was hired by a lovely client to provide a colorful garden design for the family’s backyard. The caveat to the project was that their sweet puppy ate anything growing. While we walked around the yard, the pooch did indeed sample everything. When I submitted my suggested planting list, I was confident that my choices would be fine with a plant-eating pet.

I was wrong. Several of my choices could have caused health issues depending on the amount consumed, potential allergies, or other matters.

In general, plants that are considered toxic or poisonous to people are poisonous to most animals. For example, although humans enjoy many types of mushrooms, there are numerous lethal mushrooms when ingested. If your pet nibbles on a mushroom in the wild, it must be treated as toxic. There have been instances where a plant that is safe for humans has been poisonous to an animal. ... continued on Page D13