



Dog-Proof Your Home

 By Liz Holzemer

Parents know all too well the importance of child-proofing their homes long before the arrival of their precious bundles of joy. The same should apply when welcoming your four-legged new addition. By following a few simple steps, pet owners can ensure a dog-proof home that is healthy and safe for their furry family member.

It may seem like common sense, but everyday items can prove hazardous, even deadly. “The number one piece of advice we give to pet parents is to lock up human medications,” said Dr. Steven Hansen, veterinary toxicologist and senior vice president of Animal Health Services at ASPCA in Urbana, Ill. “When a dog discovers a pill bottle, it becomes a toy and even more so to a puppy.”

Dr. Hansen was shocked by the results when he gave Gracie, his 8-year-old Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, an empty childproof prescription bottle he'd filled with candy to see if she could open it. “Fifteen seconds flat was all it took,” he said, while pointing out that a vial of pills is fair game to dogs, especially with their powerful crushing teeth. “The most common accidental poisoning is from ibuprofen because it's something we all have on hand.”

Unfortunately, prescribed cardiac, cancer and depression medications are surprisingly and commonly ingested. Pesticides and anti-freeze lead the list, as well as toxic foods including chocolate, grapes and raisins. The ASPCA, www.aspc.org, provides a comprehensive list of more than 230 plants and 13 foods dogs should avoid.

Even a well-trained dog can unknowingly get into mischief. Shireen Banerji, a clinical toxicology coordinator and pharmacist at the Rocky Mountain Poison Center recounts the time Rusty, her 6-year-old St. Bernard-Great Dane mix, ingested his year's supply of heartworm

medication. “Thankfully, he weighs 125 pounds and was OK because it was considered a small amount based on his weight, but the lesson here is medications are often tasty to dogs,” she said.

The best way to dog-proof your home is to survey each room on all fours as you would for a just-learning-to-crawl toddler. Take similar child-proofing measures by installing safety latches on drawers and cabinets; baby gates in areas where dogs – especially senior ones – are at risk of falling; securing window blinds and curtains with dangling cords and covering electrical outlets. Keep the lid on toilets – puppies are especially enticed by toilet bowl water, which carries an increased risk with toilet bowl cleanser.

Extend these safety measures outdoors by ensuring fences are free of holes, gates, trash cans and recycling bins are securely fastened and locking up anti-freeze, all cleaning supplies, gasoline, paint and fertilizers in the garage.

Averting dog poisoning should be the No. 1 dog-proofing priority among dog owners. If you suspect your dog has been poisoned immediately call your veterinary emergency hospital or local poison control center.

Bottom line, anything that is unsafe for children applies to dogs, as well. “Our purpose of existence is to prevent people from calling us,” said Hansen.

Important phone numbers to have on hand:

Animal Poison Control Center at 1(888) 426-4435
Rocky Mountain Poison Center at 1(800) 222-1222