

# Common Household Poisons and Dangers for Ferrets

*By Erinn Whitmore, AFA Education Committee*

There are many items we have in our homes that can pose dangers to our little fuzzy friends, from recliners to dryer vents. Some of them seem obvious to us to restrict access to – but what about the household items that can actually be toxic to our ferrets?

The most obvious culprits here are the items used to poison pests such as insects and rodents. These pesticides and rodenticides are also toxic to our ferrets and of course ferrets should never be exposed to them. Keep pesticides and rodenticides in the garage or basement, or other completely inaccessible area. Also remember to limit use of these chemicals indoors, because a curious fuzzy could certainly be attracted to some of the common baits used in these items and it could result in tragedy.

Any flea, tick or other pet-use pesticide needs to be cleared by your veterinarian as being safe for ferrets before being used on or around your ferrets. This includes a heavy caution against using pyrethrin-based flea shampoos and sprays directly on and around ferrets because of the high incidence of reactions to these products, though many are sold under various brand names touted as safe for ferrets. Pyrethrin is a pesticide extracted from chrysanthemums, but it can pose neurological dangers to ferrets, and many react immediately to exposure with vomiting and tremors.

Other household items such as cleaners pose poison risks to pets, especially ferrets because they are extremely sensitive. It's a good idea to get a baby lock for the under the sink storage areas to keep your ferrets from sneaking into those areas, or completely get rid of any chemical cleaners you own. Many of the "green" or environmentally friendly cleaner products are safer, too. Of course, limit access to those items as well, and be sure to clean around the ferrets with lots of ventilation. "Green" products are often made with essential oils and it's important to note that ferrets cannot metabolize essential oil phenols the way that we can. These phenols build up in their livers and over time can reach toxic levels. Tea tree oil is especially toxic, but all essential oils pose the risk and should not be used around ferrets. A commonly used, newer product is the daily spray or auto-spraying shower and tub cleaner that spritzes after each use of the tub shower stall. Since ferrets love to play in the water in tubs and showers, this chemical should never be used in bathrooms to which ferrets have access.

Human-use personal hygiene items pose dangers to ferrets, also. Many perfumes, scented body washes and lotions, and shampoos contain essential oils and other ingredients that can be toxic if ingested. Ferrets seem quite interested in soaps produced with tallow, but care should be taken to keep all soaps, shampoos, and personal hygiene products out of ferrets' reach.

Household deodorizers are also hazardous. Plug-in type deodorizing devices should be placed out of ferrets' reach as they present both an electrical hazard and are possibly poisonous if ingested. Always keep the toilet lid down, not just because illicit swimming is distasteful, but the clip on deodorizers and toilet bowl cleaning products are unsafe.

Some items we keep around our homes may not seem like obvious hazards, though, and with the holidays approaching, it's a good idea to make sure your home doesn't pose risks for your ferrets. Holiday decorations comprised of dyes, glitter, Styrofoam, etc can be hazardous as poisons or cause blockages and yet are oh so tempting to a curious ferret! Additives used in water in the basins for holiday trees should not be ingested by your ferrets either.

Many species of commonly cultivated indoors plants are highly toxic to ferrets, and we all know how much ferrets just love digging up plants. If you keep indoor potted plants, be aware that the following species are all highly toxic and ferrets should never have any kind of access to these: aloe vera, amaryllis, azalea, baby's breath, begonia, carnation, castor bean, chrysanthemum, cyclamen, daffodil, gladiola, hosta, ivy, all lily species, milkweed, morning glory, oleander, poinsettia, pothos, sago palm, tomato plants, tulips, narcissus, rhododendron, and yew. There are many other species that are toxic, but these are the most common ones brought indoors. It's a wise idea to keep all potted plants and cut flowers out of your ferrets' reach, though. Exposure to most of these plants will cause kidney damage and/or liver damage. If you suspect your ferret has been exposed, please contact your closest ferret-knowledgeable veterinarian or emergency veterinarian. It could save their life!

One other consideration with cultivating houseplants is the possibility of your ferrets' exposure to chemicals in the soil. Many commercially available potting soils include chemical additives such as fertilizers and even moisture retention compounds. Your ferrets should not be exposed to these either.

There are also many human food items that pose toxicity risks to ferrets – many that are surprising to new ferret owners and that they may have unwittingly fed as treats. These include: grapes and raisins (unknown toxin that causes kidney damage); avocado (*persin*, which causes vomiting and diarrhea); onions, garlic, and other related vegetables (contains *N-propyl disulphide*, which causes anemia); chocolates and teas, including black, green, and white tea (*theobromine*, which causes kidney and liver damage); and xylitol, a sweetener used in gums and other sugar-free foods (causes hypoglycemia and liver damage.) Of course, ferrets should always be fed an appropriate diet and limited on human food scraps and offerings anyway. Ferrets should never consume alcohol of any kind and should never have access to garbage, which could cause poisonings through bacterial infection or mold contamination. Holiday parties and buffets can make it easier for ferrets to gain access to inappropriate human foods, so celebrants must be especially vigilant.

Common household medications, hygiene products and prescription drugs are often fatal to ferrets. Even a tube of toothpaste or a box of feminine hygiene products can be a hazard. Toothpastes can sometimes contain artificial sweeteners like xylitol, as well as fluoride. As mentioned previously, xylitol is extremely toxic to pets, but fluoride is another often overlooked danger to ferrets. It is toxic to ferrets (as well as dogs and cats) and will cause heart rate abnormalities, digestive upset, neurological symptoms such as tremors, weakness, and eventually collapsing and death. Most human-use medications, pain relievers, decongestants, etc are highly toxic to ferrets and should never be administered to or stored in somewhere accessible to a ferret. Items such as Advil (ibuprofen) and Tylenol (Acetaminophen) will cause kidney damage and liver damage upon consumption, and can easily be lethal.

Ferrets' curious natures, persistence and climbing capabilities cannot be stressed enough. If you suspect your ferret has had access to any possible poisons, please call your regular veterinarian immediately. If it is off-hours, call your nearest emergency clinic that treats ferrets, or call the ASPCA's National Poison Control Hotline at **1-888-426-4435**. (A \$60 fee may be billed to your credit card for services rendered.)

Do you have creative tips for keeping ferrets safe? For instance, raised planter stands are helpful in keeping ferrets safe from potted plants, but knowing your specific ferrets and their abilities are extremely important in ferret-proofing your home. Playpens and pet gates are useful tools in blocking and restricting access to certain areas of the home, and keeping your ferrets occupied with appropriate activities and exercise routines will keep them stimulated, safe, and healthy. If you do have tips such as this and are willing to share them, post on the American Ferret Association's

Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/americanferretassociation/>.

For more information of potential toxins around your home and how to safeguard your pets, check out the ASPCA's Toxic and Non-Toxic Database at: <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>

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## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO COMMON HOUSEHOLD DANGERS FOR FERRETS

### Toxic Plants:

Aloe vera  
Amaryllis  
Azalea  
Baby's breath  
Begonia  
Carnation  
Castor bean  
Chrysanthemum  
Cyclamen  
Daffodil  
Gladiola  
Hosta  
Ivy  
All lily species  
Milkweed  
Morning glory  
Oleander  
Poinsettia  
Pothos  
Sago palm  
Tomato plants  
Tulips  
Narcissus  
Rhododendron  
Yew

### Toxic Food Items:

Grapes and raisins  
Avocado  
Onions, garlic, and other related vegetables  
Chocolate  
Tea  
Xylitol  
Alcohol  
Garbage

### Hazardous Household Items:

Insecticides  
Pesticides  
Rodenticides  
Weed-killers  
Ant traps  
Mouse traps  
Cleansers  
Detergents  
Disinfectants  
Soaps  
Lotions  
Shampoos/conditioners  
Hair styling products  
Dental hygiene products  
Feminine Hygiene Products  
Essential oils  
Perfumes and fragrances  
Household deodorizers  
Potting soils and fertilizers  
Ibuprofen  
Acetaminophen  
Other pain relievers, decongestants, and prescription drugs

**Visit the American Ferret Association to learn all about ferret care, foods & more!**

**The American Ferret Association PO Box 554 Frederick, MD 21705-0554**

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