

Sago Palms:

Beautiful Ornamental Plant or Deadly Poison?

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Being in a sub-tropical environment like we are on the Gulf Coast, sago palms are popular ornamental plants that landscapers love to plant and veterinarians loathe! These palms, which really are not true palms, are very common in Texas and are growing in your yard or at the very least in your neighbor's yard. Animals are very curious and without proper supervision, they could chew on this deadly plant and succumb to liver failure and death.

Sago palms are both savory and sweet, thus dogs and cats are attracted to eating them. They are especially attracted to the younger plants with "softer" leaves and mature plant's "ball-like" seed pods, as they resemble chew toys or bones. The sago palm is not a palm at all. It is a member of the plant family, Cycadaceae, which has been around since prehistoric times. These plants contain a very potent and deadly toxin, called

cycasin, which incidentally is also toxic to humans.

Ingestion or chewing on any part of the plant i.e. leaves, bark, seed pods leads to sago palm toxicity. If you suspect that your pet has chewed on or ingested ANY part of a sago palm, no matter what the quantity, please seek veterinary attention immediately!



Clinical signs post exposure includes vomiting (oftentimes with fresh blood), diarrhea, depression, bruising, jaundice (or yellow skin or whites of the eyes), lack of coordination, coma or seizures. Vomiting typically starts within a few minutes to hours of

ingestion, so please check your pet's vomitus for plant parts. Liver failure can happen 2-3 days post-ingestion.

Aggressive treatment MUST be started immediately. Unfortunately there is no antidote, so the key is prevention. Treatment is aimed at aggressive supportive care to help promote liver health with IV fluids, anti-nausea medications, activated charcoal/cholestyramine to prevent continued toxin absorp-

to have escaped acute liver failure, it is very important to realize that delayed liver toxicity can ensue 4-6 months post ingestion. Thus, serial bloodwork must be done to monitor for this tragic development.

The best advice veterinary professionals have for our beloved pet population is to remove sago palms from your yard, neighborhood and landscaper's planting repertoire. Prevention is the key! Should you elect to have

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tion, GI and liver protectants and plasma transfusions if blood clotting issues develop. Baseline and serial bloodwork will be done to monitor your pet's liver function. Unfortunately, once liver failure develops, sago palm toxicity is uniformly fatal. If your pet is "lucky" enough

this deadly plant removed from your yard, you should be applauded. However, please make sure you and/or the landscaping professionals are vigilant about removing all plant parts and debris from the yard to prevent any accidental pet exposure!