

Q&A

Not all holiday plants are dangerous

Q: It's that time of year again. Will you warn people to be careful when setting out their holiday decorations, especially holly, mistletoe and poinsettias? Save a pet's life! — *L.R., via e-mail*

A: The holidays can offer up some hazards to pets, but poinsettias are not among them — although the idea that they are seems almost impossible to eradicate.

But it's true: The popular holiday plant with the red leaves is safe around pets. According to the Animal Poison Control Center (www.asPCA.org/apcc), the poinsettia can cause little more than a bad tummyache, even if ingested in fairly large amounts. That doesn't mean you should put poinsettia foliage into the food processor and then add it to your pet's dish. But it does mean that you can quit worrying that the plant your aunt gave you for the holidays is going to do in your dog.

Mistletoe and holly are another matter, though, as is the bulb of the amaryllis plant. These should probably not be part of your home's holiday decorating — or at least put them where your pet can't get to them.

Maybe it's not a bad idea to invest in all the lovely fake greenery that's available these days. I remember when fake trees and other synthetic holiday greenery looked awful. These days, it all looks a lot nicer and can be used for years. Plus, fake greens are not as attractive to pets who want to chew. (I love my little fake tree with its energy-saving LED lights pre-strung!)

Next week we'll have our annual write-up of holiday hazards, with a complete list of everything worth worrying about (at least as far as your pet's concerned) from now until New Year's. — *Gina Spadafori*

Do you have a pet question? Send it to petconnection@gmail.com.



Contrary to rumor, poinsettias are not a danger to pets.



About Pet Connection

Pet Connection is produced by a team of pet-care experts headed by "Good Morning America" veterinarian Dr. Marty Becker and award-winning journalist Gina Spadafori. The two are also the authors of several best-selling pet-care books.

On PetConnection.com there's more information on pets and their care, reviews of products, books and "dog cars," and a weekly drawing for pet-care prizes. Contact Pet Connection in care of this newspaper by sending e-mail to petconnection@gmail.com or by visiting PetConnection.com.



MORGAN ONG / Universal Press Syndicate

Maddie's Fund President Richard Avanzino believes that within a decade shelters will work with their communities to stop the killing of homeless animals — and to find enough good homes.

Call for change

Top animal advocates push for shelters to alter operating practices

By **GINA SPADAFORI** and **CHRISTIE KEITH**
Universal Press Syndicate

Where others see death, Richard Avanzino sees hope. Where others see an intractable problem, Nathan Winograd sees a solution.

Together, the two men — one carrot, the other stick; one preaching evolution, the other revolution — are the visionaries of a grassroots movement to change the way the nation's animal shelters do business.

Their vision is a no-kill nation, where no pet is killed for lack of a home. They say it's not a dream, and it will be a reality.

"We think we will achieve success in less than 10 years," said Avanzino, president of Maddie's Fund. Based in Alameda, Calif., it was founded with the fortune of software moguls Dave and Cheryl Duffield and was named in memory of their dog.

As director of the San Francisco SPCA in the '90s, Avanzino turned around a struggling shelter by refusing to kill the city's adoptable pets. The SFSPCA put in place free spay/neuter clinics, mobile adoptions, trap-neuter-release programs for feral cats, behavior advice and foster care — programs now common in progressive shelters nationwide.

"All the things that we did in San Francisco were initially rejected and received with great hostility," said Avanzino. "Today, I can look backward and say without almost any exception that all the programs the organized humane community fought against they have now embraced and



nokilladvocacycenter.org

"The buck stops at the shelter director's desk," says Nathan Winograd, whose hard-hitting book is making many shelter directors both furious and nervous.

made the cornerstone of their own programs."

But the pace of change hasn't been fast enough for Winograd, who, as director of operations at the SFSPCA under Avanzino, heard plenty of the criticism. "No kill" was derided as "someone else kill," and San Francisco's experience was dismissed as a fluke, a manipulation of statistics or the product of the city's unique characteristics.

So Winograd crossed the country to Ithaca, N.Y., taking over the Tompkins County municipal shelter. He ended the killing of pets for population control and led the agency — an open-door shelter that held the animal control contract for the rural county — to sending out more than 90 percent of the shelter's animals alive.

"The buck stops at the shelter director's desk," he said.

He slams home that point in a provocative book that puts

the blame for millions of shelter deaths not on animal lovers, but on the entrenched ideas of shelter directors who fail to seek the help of a pet-loving population and who value clean, empty cages more than living, breathing animals who need help to find homes.

Winograd's book "Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America" (Almaden, \$17) has made many of the nation's shelter directors both furious and nervous, even as it has energized animal lovers who want to know why no-kill can't happen in their communities. Winograd, now heading the No Kill Advocacy Center based in San Clemente, Calif., is telling them that it can.

"Shelters call people 'irresponsible pet owners,' but (shelters) are the ones refusing to take responsibility for the fate of the animals in their care," said Winograd. "While it's people who surrender animals to shelters, it's shelters who kill (those animals)."

While Winograd's take-no-prisoners approach is galvanizing audiences on the stops of his packed book tour, Avanzino and Maddie's Fund are more quietly building bridges, reaching out to no-kill skeptics while working to build no-kill communities.

"We aren't having a litmus test on who our friends are," said Avanzino. "We want to partner with everybody who loves animals."

Good cop, bad cop? Maybe. But Avanzino and Winograd both say the power of the no-kill movement doesn't come from either of them or from their organizations.

"The public's on board, and that's the salvation," said Avanzino. "That's what's going to be there as the true safety net for the animals."

"In communities that have achieved no-kill, the public has made the difference," Winograd said.

"Society is now leaps and bounds ahead in terms of how much they value and cherish animals."

pet buzz

Protecting pets from the sun

• White-coated and thin-coated dogs are vulnerable to skin cancer, and veterinary dermatologists have long recommended sunblock for these pets. But now there's sunscreen just for pets. Created by a veterinarian who's also a human aesthetician, Dr. Fleck's Epi-Pet Sun Protector meets U.S. Food and Drug Administration standards for both UVA and UVB protection.

• MSNBC.com recently reported on the 10 cities that cater to the needs of pet and pet lover alike. This year's top-dog city is San Diego, chosen for off-leash beaches, pet-sitting services, pet-friendly restaurants and kayaking for dogs. Other pick-of-the-litter cities include Seattle; New York City; Carmel, Calif.; Chicago; Orlando, Fla.; Portland, Ore.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Austin, Texas; and Long Beach, Calif.

• Hope for human knee-pain sufferers comes from Dr. James Cook, a veterinarian at the University of Missouri's Comparative Orthopedic Laboratory. The Columbia (Mo.) Tribune reports that the FDA-approved device, perfected on dogs before approval in human medicine, brings blood to the damaged cartilage disk called the "meniscus," allowing it to heal. — *Dr. Marty Becker*

Skin cancer happens in dogs, too, and for the vulnerable ones, sunscreen is a good idea.



GOOD BEHAVIOR

Working vocabulary helps your pet obey

When dogs are excited, it is difficult for them to respond or learn.

Prepare for attention-stealing events such as a person approaching your door or a cat running by within sight by teaching your dog a working vocabulary such as "sit," "watch me" and "quiet." Teach what the words mean when your dog is hungry and is motivated to learn. Then practice using those words in many locations.

Help your dog learn to respond when distracted by setting up circumstances you can control, such as a doorbell ringing. Use the words your dog knows in a firm voice to gain compliance when the situation demands it. Having a working vocabulary your dog understands helps you insist on acceptable behaviors.

(Animal behavior experts Susan and Dr. Rolan Tripp are the authors of "On Good Behavior." For more information, visit their Web site at AnimalBehavior.net.)

DOGCARS.COM

Mazda Speed3 will give your dog thrills

When did we forget how much fun driving could be? If you're looking for something to remind you, drive a Mazda Speed3.

When the Speed3 arrived, I wasn't that excited. I looked it over and figured it would be what I call a "city dog car" — small, easy to park, and relatively inexpensive both to buy and to drive.

The four-door hatchback will never be used to haul a team of sled dogs, a load of pet crates or a ton of gear, but the seats fold flat, leaving a comfortable cargo area for a small, crated dog or a seat-belted larger one. Nice, but nothing special.

But then you turn the key.

The spine-tingling rumble of the Speed3's 250 turbocharged ponies lets you know right away you're not in some economy hatchback. Strap in the pup: We're talking g-force



The Mazda Speed3 is so much fun to drive, it'll make you forget it's a functional, dog-friendly hatchback.

when you punch it and thrilling stickiness on the curves.

City car? Oh sure, the front-wheel-drive wonder is easy to park and no problem in traffic, even with its six-speed manual transmission. But you and your canine companion will

soon be thinking up reasons to get out of town, trying some twisting mountain roads just for the fun of it.

Prices start at \$22,975. Fuel economy is a decent 18/26 mpg, although it does require premium gas.

Bottom line: It's a great city dog car, totally unleashed. And more fun than is legal in many states.

(Gina Spadafori reviews vehicles for dog lovers, all of which are on the Pet Connection's DogCars.com Web site.)

BY THE NUMBERS

Animal lovers: Pets are people, too

According to a 2004 survey, 94 percent of pet owners say their pet has humanlike personality traits, such as (multiple responses allowed):

30 percent	17 percent
Emotional/sensitive	Laid-back
28 percent	8 percent
Outgoing	Competitive
26 percent	6 percent
Inquisitive	Reserved/shy
20 percent	8 percent
Stubborn	Other



Most animal lovers say their pets have personality traits just as people do.

Source: American Animal Hospital Association

PET TIP

Recycled covers for cat beds

Cats crave warmth, which is why they're wonderful bed companions on a cold night. But when you can't be there to provide snuggle space, your cat will appreciate a soft bed to sleep on.

The Denver Dumb Friends League uses old toilet-seat covers to cushion cats waiting for adoption. The covers are the perfect size for most cats and provide a perfect option to throwing out old covers when they're worn or your decor changes. (If you have extras, check to see if your local shelter will welcome the donation.)

Since covering upholstery is one way to protect it from cat hair, you might put a seat cover or two in places your cat loves to nap, such as the couch or a favorite chair. Whatever hair ends up on the seat cover won't get on your upholstery and will easily come out in the wash. — *Gina Spadafori*