Recently, my husband and I adopted a large, adult dog. While our female was always quiet and reserved, this male is energetic and rambunctious. I immediately noticed that he was not particularly fond of some of my landscaping and decided to add his own personal touch to our backyard.

Do your pets and your landscape seem incompatible? Landscaping and dogs do present challenges that may require some compromises. The goal in this balancing act is to achieve an attractive, dog-friendly yard.

For pets with sniffing snouts and hearty appetites, homeowners must be careful with the plants they pick. Use only non-toxic species for your plantings. Landscape plants that can be poisonous to animals include aloe, amaryllis, caladiums, English ivy, gladiolas, glory lily, oleander and sago palms.

Constantly scout your yard for toxic weeds and mushrooms. Certain weeds, like nightshade, can be dangerous for both people and animals. It's also best to remove mushrooms from your yard whenever you see them. Always assume that any ingested mushroom is highly toxic until a mycologist positively identifies it.

In those areas where your dog has created their own personal racetrack and the grass is wearing thin, think about using an alternative. Install some hardscape, like pavers or stone, over the existing dog path. You can also use crushed stone or safe organic mulches.

Some organic mulches, like cocoa hull mulch, contain compounds that can be toxic to dogs. Mulch made from cocoa beans contains similarly harmful compounds. The smell and taste of this innocent looking mulch is very appealing to pets, yet it can be deadly because it contains theobromine. Avoid using this type of garden mulch if you have pets.

But what if you reject the idea of incorporating hardscape, sticking stubbornly to your wish for a "green carpet" of grass? At the very least, consider switching to a paw-tolerant type of grass such as bermuda.

Another common issue are "urine spots." When you see a dog urinating on the grass, rush to the garden hose. Turn it on and bring it over to the area where your dog has just urinated. Douse the area with water,
thereby flushing it and diluting the harmful elements in the dog urine.

But perhaps one of the most important things you can do to ensure a pet-friendly yard is to control pests responsibly. Use integrated pest management techniques, beneficial insects or bio-rational products when you can.

If you must use chemical pesticides, be sure to read the product label (even if you used a particular product in the past, since formulas often change), and consider switching to natural alternatives. Many will specifically state to keep pets off the lawn or away from the plants for a certain time or until the product has dried.

Some of the most dangerous types of pesticides include snail and slug bait, ant and roach bait, ant and roach traps and mouse baits. Eliminating the use of poisonous pesticides and heavy fertilizers is the best way to make your garden safer for your pets.

Pets are our companions and deserve our care. Pesticide products can help alleviate pest problems in and around the home, but every pet's caretaker needs to take the proper precautions.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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