



The Sago Palm, a common landscape plant, is highly toxic to pets. DEMOCRAT FILES

Widely found Sago Palm lethal to pets

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The Sago Palm, a plant with long fronds resembling a short palm tree, is one of the most popular plants used by landscapers in the Tallahassee area.

Landscapers at Esposito Garden Center estimate the number of Sago Palms in Tallahassee to be in the thousands, although it is not native to the area.

With these plants becoming increasingly easy to find, veterinarians and dog owners alike are being troubled by the problem they present.

Dr. Kevin Brumfield of the Northwood Animal Hospital has had numerous recent cases of dogs ingesting parts of the plant, causing acute liver

failure, and in most cases, death.

Despite the name, the Sago Palm is not truly a palm tree, but rather a Cycad, a member of the Cycadaceae family, and a deadly one at that. This plant contains cycasin — one of the deadliest poisons to animals.

Shortly after ingesting the poison, symptoms such as vomiting or diarrhea may appear. Sometimes the animal will vomit blood or have gastrointestinal symptoms, and is usually very lethargic.

The poison can cause severe liver disease or failure.

"The animal can expire within days," said Dr. Shane Burkhead at North Florida Animal Hospital. "They may make it through the acute phase of the dis-

ease, but after that they have a 50/50 chance of survival."

Burkhead explains that the poison may leave lasting effects in the dog's system, and that death can occur even six months later from liver disease.

"The best thing to do is take the animal to the doctor to get them to vomit the poison out of their systems," said Burkhead.

"We treat them for acute gastric disease, or sometimes they get pancreatitis," Burkhead said. "We treat them very aggressively with broad spectrum antibiotics."

In addition to dogs, the Sago Palm is also poisonous to cats and horses, according to The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).