

Sunflowers, cornflowers, zinnias and wild roses are considered nontoxic to cats. Identify each flower before bringing it indoors, and remember that even a nontoxic plant can cause an upset stomach if a cat eats it.

Wildflowers to look for

These flowers are among the safer choices for a home with cats. Use the botanical name to check an identification, since common names can refer to different plants.

Sunflower, Helianthus annuus: Its large flower head and broad leaves are distinctive, though cultivated varieties come in several sizes and colors. Choose clean stems without signs of chemical treatment.

Cornflower, Centaurea cyanus: Often blue, cornflowers have fringed petals and narrow leaves. They are also called bachelor's buttons. Check the botanical name rather than relying on that common name alone.

Zinnia, Zinnia elegans: Zinnias have bright flower heads in a range of colors. They are often grown in gardens and may also appear in mixed flower plantings.

Wild roses, Rosa species: Rose petals and leaves are considered nontoxic to cats. The thorns are another matter: they can scratch a curious nose or paw. Remove thorny sections or keep the stems out of reach.

Flowers to leave outside

Do not bring true lilies or daylilies into a home with cats. These plants are especially dangerous: petals, leaves, pollen and vase water can all pose a risk. Even a small exposure can cause serious kidney damage.

Daffodils, tulips and foxgloves are also toxic to cats. Bulbs can be especially hazardous, so do not bring them home with cut flowers. A mixed bunch may hide a stem you did not notice. If you cannot identify every flower and piece of foliage, leave the bunch outside.

How to bring a bunch home

1. Identify every plant using a reliable field guide or a knowledgeable local expert. Check leaves and stems as well as flowers. If you are unsure, do not pick it.
2. Check local rules before picking. Avoid protected plants and places where collecting is not allowed. Get permission before picking on private land.
3. Avoid flowers from roadsides or areas that may have been sprayed. Rinsing is not a reliable way to remove every chemical residue.
4. Use a stable vase and place it where your cat cannot easily reach the flowers or water. Remove loose leaves and petals, and change the water regularly.

Common questions

Can my cat eat a safe wildflower?

It is best to discourage chewing. Nontoxic does not mean edible in any amount, and plant material can still cause vomiting or stomach irritation.

Is vase water safe for cats?

Do not let your cat drink it. The water can collect plant debris or contain flower food. Keep the vase out of reach and provide fresh drinking water instead.

What if my cat chews an unknown flower?

Remove the flower and call your veterinarian or an animal poison service promptly. Keep a sample or take a clear photo for identification. Do not induce vomiting unless a veterinary professional tells you to.

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