

Plants – Friend or Foe?

We are both a nation of animal lovers and, thanks to a host of television programmes such as Life, the Inside Out Show and good old favourite Gardeners World, our homes, offices and shops have been transformed into lush tropical visions of the natural world. Plants not only look attractive and smell heavenly, but they can bring with them a wonderful sense of peace, and a oneness with nature. They will grow almost anywhere; even the smallest garden or window ledge of the most amateur gardener can, with a little encouragement, sprout life.

Sometimes our two passions can live hand in hand with each other, but at other times they can be deadly; there are some plants so toxic that they are not safe to grow or even be handled by the most experienced gardeners, while others such as pitfall, flypaper, snap, bladder and lobster-pot traps ensnare and kill their prey for their nutrients, and that's before you even start to think about the *borderline* carnivores! So is there a solution?



Just recently my in-laws decided, for reasons best known to them, to present us with a lovely Primula (*Primula Obconica*) in a pot – clearly meant to be kept as a houseplant! Now having several house cats, keeping plants is not something we generally indulge in any more. We used to; in the days

when we had only household pets, who went outside, and spent their days sleeping under the nearest bush; but after we had our first pedigree, and he developed a taste for the cacti we so loved, and became violently ill as result, we quickly reconciled ourselves to living in a plant free state for the most part. Plants live outside in the garden, we and the cats inside. Simple.

But now we had a plant. True we could have taken it outside and planted it, where it could have taken its chances along with everything else, but what with the winter weather soon upon us and various insects etc. we thought it didn't have much of a chance so we decided put it somewhere where the cats don't go. Seeking out high window ledges, hanging baskets, the tops of tall cabinets etc, are, as I'm sure you'd agree no good with several indoor cats in the house – ledges and cupboards and shelves are their natural playground anyway. So the plant was shut in my office – which is a no cat zone unless I'm in there working too - while I went on the internet to try and find if the Primula was a Friend or Foe.

So I, like hundreds of others typed in "Plants that are safe for Cats" and received 21,400 results in a



little under point 22 of a second. Sorted I thought in my ignorance, I just need to read down and find Primula on the list. A veritable host of Latin names jumped out at me –



Spider Plant

none of which matched the wrapping round my plant. So I thought I'd try another site. This one was full of colloquial names, but only had a handful of plants listed, so I went onto a third site. Bingo! The Primula was mentioned as a foe.... but it was there that I started to notice something rather worrying, and pulled up a fourth site just to be sure... and yes there were some plants listed in the friend section of one list that were listed in the foe section of another or missed out altogether!!

Whilst in general most sites seemed to agree that all types of Lilies are dangerous for cats and the Christmas favourite the Poinsettia is also extremely deadly, it seemed that while most types of herbs are safe, confusion seems to reign over the humble spider plant! The Spider Plant or *chlorophytum comosum* seems to be listed on various sites on both sides with joyful abandon. And so listed in no particular order – just as I came to them - I found the following for the three plants shown in this article. The Miniature Rose, Spider Plant and Primula.

www.gaylee.co.uk/Poisonous_plants1.html - here the Spider Plant is listed as the 2nd most dangerous plant you can have in your house (up there with the Lily) and joint with the Poinsettia, but neither the Miniature Rose, or Primula or even Primrose is listed.

www.moggies.co.uk/plants - this is the poisons part of their site. The Spider Plant is not mentioned nor is the rose, but the Primrose is! www.moggies.co.uk/nontoxic - lists the Spider Plant as being safe but doesn't mention the miniature rose or Primula. And as most gardeners will tell you that while the Primrose and Primula look the same, and are of the same family there are several distinct differences.

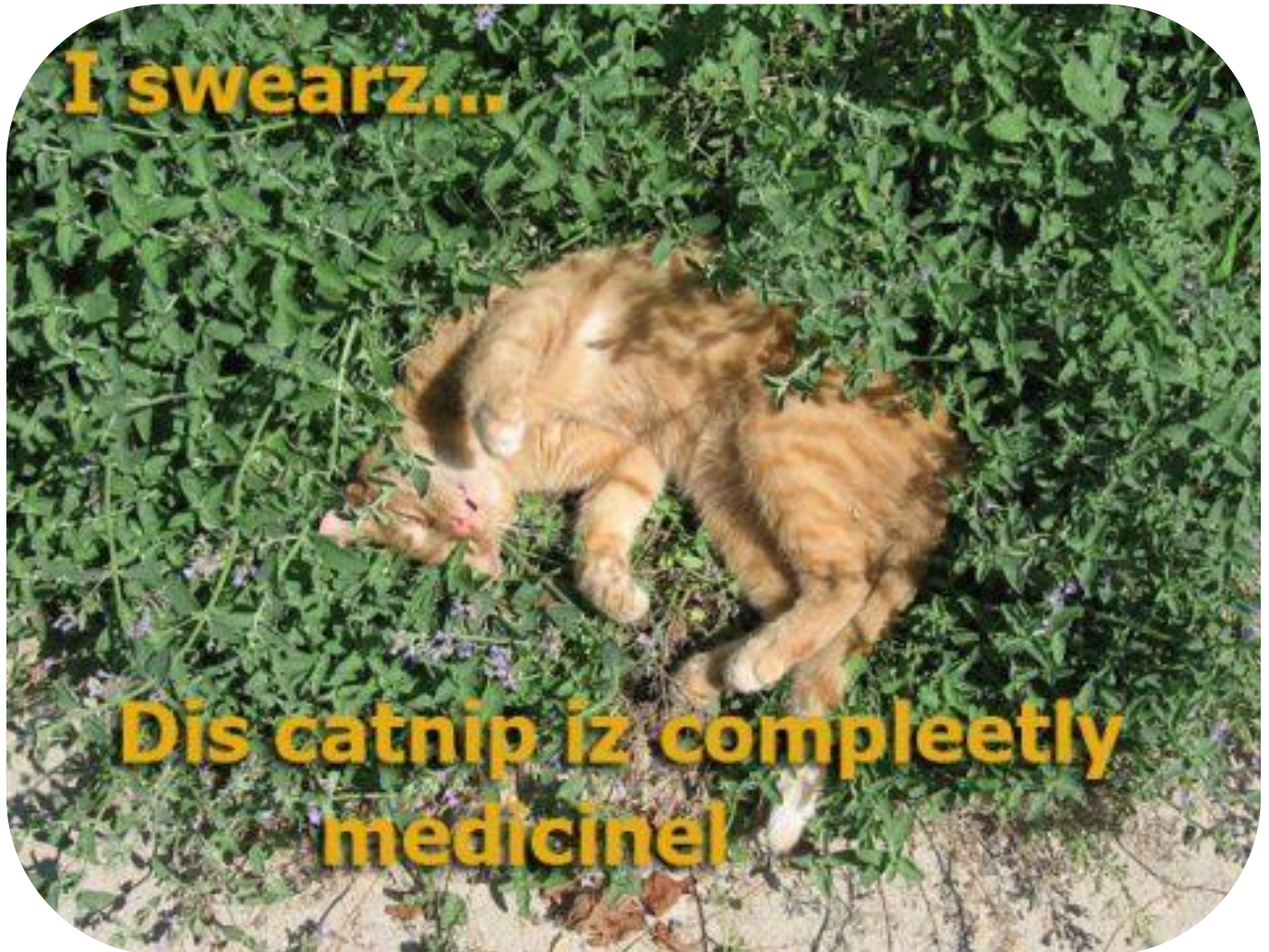
www.safegardening.co.uk/Petsafeplants.html - again the Spider Plant is listed as safe but neither the Rose nor Primrose nor Primula gets a mention. www.paws-on-floors.co.uk/catplants.html - Again the Spider Plant is listed as safe, and while you should avoid Primroses, there is nothing on the Primula or Roses themselves.



Miniature Rose

www.thecatsite.com/forums/showthread.php?t=23213 – Has a very long list of plants to avoid and seems very comprehensive. Spider Plants are safe, but yet again there is no mention of the Primrose/Primula or rose. And last, but not least www.icatcare.org/advice-centre/cat-care/cats-and-poisonous-plants - Once again the good old spider plant is not listed! Roses are not listed either – but at last hurrah! The *Primula Obconica* is mentioned and it even goes so far as to say that contact with it may cause skin irritation.

The moral of this tale; the Primula will remain in my office until the weather is warm enough for it to be planted outside (with all our other plants). Our cats will remain safe from plant matter and, if we feel the need to smell the roses, we'll do so outside and content ourselves with pictures of flowers on the wall, TV or computer. Silk flowers just get chewed... and that's a whole other tale!



And lastly a cat rolling around in a Catnip Patch – the one plant most cats seem to adore!