

SPRINGTIME WARNING!

COCOA BEAN MULCH TOXIC FOR DOGS

Cocoa bean shells, a by-product of chocolate production, are sold as mulch for landscaping. Homeowners find cocoa mulch desirable because it degrades into an organic fertilizer and provides an attractive color and odor. Unprocessed beans, derived from the *Theobroma cacao* plant, contain 1-4% theobromine/0.07%-0.36% caffeine, whereas cocoa bean mulch contains 0.19%-2.98% theobromine. Some dogs find the mulch attractive and will eat it, sometimes in large amounts.

In response to increasing reports of dogs eating cocoa bean mulch used in landscaping, a retrospective case study was conducted to further define this unique phenomenon. Sixteen cases of cocoa mulch ingestion by dogs were managed between January 02 and April 03. Of these, six cases were selected for analysis.

In 50% of the analyzed cases, vomiting was reported, 33% involved tremors, and in 17% tachycardia (rapid heart beat), hyperactivity, or diarrhea was reported. In 33% of cases, no clinical signs developed.

Conclusion: Dogs consuming cocoa bean mulch may develop methylxanthine toxicosis. Case data suggests clinical following ingestion include vomiting and muscle tremors. Although oral doses could not be quantitatively determined, clinical severity increased with increasing quantities. Pet owners should avoid use of cocoa bean mulch in landscaping around dogs with indiscriminate eating habits.