

# Common Poisonous Plants

## House Plants

**Castor Bean** seeds are toxic and cause a burning sensation in the mouth and throat. Two to four beans may cause death. Eight beans are usually lethal.

**Dieffenbachia (dumbcane), caladium, elephant's ear, some philodendrons** all parts are toxic and cause intense burning and irritation of the mouth, tongue and lips. Death from dieffenbachia poisoning has occurred when tissues at the back of the tongue swelled and blocked air passage to the throat. The other plants have similar but less toxic characteristics.

**Mistletoe** berries are toxic and can cause acute stomach and intestinal irritation. Cattle have been killed from eating wild mistletoe. People have died from "tea" of berries.

**Poinsettia** leaves and flowers are toxic and can be irritating to the mouth and stomach, sometimes causing vomiting and nausea, but usually producing no ill effects.

## Vegetable Garden Plants

**Potato** vines, sprouts and spoiled tubers are toxic. Death has occurred from eating large amounts of green parts. To prevent poisoning from sunburned tubers, green spots should be removed before cooking. Discard spoiled potatoes.

**Rhubarb** leaf blades are toxic. Several deaths from eating raw or cooked leaves have occurred. Abdominal pains, vomiting and convulsions can occur a few hours after ingestion. Without treatment, death or permanent kidney damage may occur.

## Ornamental Plants

**Atropa belladonna** all parts, especially the black berries are toxic. Fever, rapid heartbeat, dilation of the pupils, flushed hot and dry skin can all occur. Three berries were fatal to one child.

**Carolina jessamine, yellow jessamine** flowers and leaves are toxic and have poisoned children who sucked nectar from the flowers. May cause depression followed by death through respiratory failure.

**Daphne** berries and bark are toxic. A few berries can cause burning or ulceration in the digestive tract causing vomiting and diarrhea. Death can result. This plant is considered "really dangerous", particularly for children.

**English ivy** berries and leaves are toxic and cause excitement, difficulty breathing and eventually coma.

**Golden chain (laburnum)** seeds, pods and flowers are toxic and cause excitement, intestinal irritation, severe nausea with convulsions and coma if large quantities are eaten.

**Health family (some laurels, rhododendron, azaleas)** All parts are toxic and cause salivation, nausea, vomiting and depression. "Tea" made from two ounces of leaves produced human poisoning.

**Holly** berries are toxic. Large quantities may cause digestive upset.

**Jerusalem cherry** unripe fruit, leaves and flowers are thought to cause vomiting and diarrhea. However, when cooked, some species are used for jellies and preserves.

**Lantana** unripe greenish-blue or black berries are toxic and can be lethal to children through muscular weakness and circulatory collapse. Less severe cases experience gastrointestinal irritation.

**Oleander** leaves, branches and the nectar of flowers are toxic and extremely poisonous. The poison affects the heart and digestive system and has caused death even roasting meat on its branches. A few leaves can kill a human being.

**Wisteria** seeds and pods are toxic. The pods look like pea pods. One or two seeds may cause mild to severe gastrointestinal disturbances requiring hospitalization.

**Yew** needles, bark and seeds are toxic. Ingestion of English or Japanese yew foliage may cause sudden death as alkaloid weakens and eventually stops the heart. If less is eaten, symptoms include trembling and difficulty breathing.

## Trees and Shrubs

**Black Locust** bark, foliage, young twigs and seeds are toxic and digestive upset has occurred from ingestion of the soft bark. Seeds may also be toxic to children. Flowers may be fried as fritters.

**Buckeye, horsechestnut** sprouts and nuts are toxic and may cause digestive upset and nervous symptoms (confusion, etc.).

**Chinaberry tree** berries are toxic and can cause nausea, vomiting, excitement or depression and symptoms of suffocation.

**Elderberry** roots and stems are toxic and children have been poisoned by eating roots or by using the pithy stems as blowguns. Berries are the least toxic part but may cause nausea if too many are eaten raw.

**Jatropha (purge nut, curcas bean, peregrina, psychic nut)** seeds and oil are toxic and cause nausea, violent vomiting and abdominal pain.

**Oaks** all parts are toxic and eating large quantities of any raw part, including acorns, may cause slow damage to kidneys.

**Wild black cherry, chokecherry** leaves and pits are toxic. Poisoning and death have occurred in children who ate large amounts of berries without removing stones, pits or seeds, foliage and bark contain HCN (prussic acid or cyanide). Others to beware of: several wild and cultivated cherries, peach, apricot and some almonds. But pits and leaves usually not eaten in enough quantity to do serious harm.

**Yellow oleander (be-still tree)** all parts, especially kernels of the fruit are toxic. In Oahu, Hawaii, this tree is rated as the most frequent source of serious or lethal poisoning in man. One or two fruits may be fatal. Symptoms are similar to fatal digitalis poisoning.

## Flower Garden Plants

**Aconite, monkshood** roots, flowers and leaves are toxic and cause restlessness, salivation, nausea, vomiting and vertigo.

**Autumn crocus** all parts, especially the bulbs are toxic. Poisoning causes burning in the mouth and gastrointestinal irritation. Eating the flowers has poisoned children.

**Dutchman's breeches (bleeding heart)** foliage and roots are toxic. Although no human poisonings or deaths have been reported a record of toxicity for livestock is a warning that the garden species may be dangerous.

**Foxglove** all parts, especially leaves, flowers and seeds are toxic. Foxglove is one of the sources of the drug digitalis. Poisoning may cause dangerously irregular heartbeat, digestive upset and mental confusion. Convulsions and death are possible.

**Larkspur, delphinium** seeds and young plants are toxic. Livestock losses from Larkspur poisoning are second only to locoweed in the western U.S. Therefore, garden larkspur should at least be help suspect.

**Lily-of-the-valley** leaves, flowers and fruit (red berries) are toxic and produce glycoside like digitalis which in medicine is used to strengthen the beat of a weakened heart and in moderate amounts can cause irregular heartbeat, digestive upset and mental confusion.

**Nicotiana** wild and cultivated leaves are toxic and cause nervous and gastric symptoms. Poisonous or lethal amounts can be obtained from ingestion of cured smoking or chewing tobacco, from foliage of field-grown tobacco or from foliage of the garden variety (flowering tobacco or nicotiana).

## Wild Plants

**Baneberry (doll's-eyes)** red or white berries, roots and foliage are poisonous and cause acute stomach cramps, headache, vomiting, dizziness and delirium.

**Death camas** bulbs are toxic. Poison causes depression, digestive upset, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea.

**Jack-in-the-pulpit, skunk cabbage** all parts, especially the roots are toxic. The plant contains small needle-like crystals of calcium oxalate and causes burning and severe irritation of the mouth and tongue.

**Jimsonweed (thornapple)** all parts, especially the seeds and leaves are toxic and cause thirst, hyper-irritability of the nervous system, disturbed vision and delirium. Poisonings have occurred from sucking nectar from the tube of the flower or from eating fruits containing poisonous seeds.

**Mayapple (mandrake)** roots, foliage, and unripe fruit are toxic. Large doses may cause gastroenteritis and vomiting. The ripe fruit is the least toxic part and has been eaten by children with occasional catharsis results. Cooked mayapples can be made into marmalade.

**Nightshades, European bittersweet, horse nettle (solanum)** all parts, especially the unripe berry are toxic. Children have been poisoned by ingesting a moderate amount of unripe berries. Symptoms include digestive upset, stupefaction and loss of sensation. Death due to paralysis can occur. Ripe berries, however, are much less toxic.

**Poison hemlock** roots, berries and foliage are toxic. The root resembles a wild carrot. Seeds have been mistaken for anise. Poisoning causes gradual weakening of muscular power and death from paralysis of the lungs. This is what caused Socrates death.

**Pokeweed (pigeonberry)** roots, berries and foliage are toxic and cause a burning sensation in the mouth and throat, digestive upset and cramps. Also, causes abnormalities in the blood when eaten raw.

**Water hemlock (cowbane, snakeroot)** roots and young foliage are toxic. Salivation, tremors, delirium and violent convulsions are poison symptoms. The roots are often mistaken for wild parsnip or artichoke.



**Oleander**



**Poison hemlock**



**Water hemlock**