

*Poison  
Plants  
Identified*



*By  
Ray Gordon*

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Published 2000

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# POISON PLANTS

Most of us recognize and avoid Poison Ivy and no knowledgeable wild foods forager would pick a pot herb without first consulting a reputable field guide. The fact is, that toxic green is thriving everywhere including your own yard and garden. Poisonous plants are virtually everywhere and most of us readily recognize the most popular ones, yet each year many folks are poisoned by accidentally eating or coming in contact with the less known varieties.

Contact with many of these poisonous plants results in dermatitis, or skin rash, and included in these plants are some well known vegetable plants. Rhubarb, tomatoes vines, potato plants, and some fruit trees are well-known examples of these potentially dangerous garden varieties. Berries are another example. Though most berries are edible and quite delicious, many are attractive...yet DEADLY. The following list includes a small sampling of plants that can cause internal poisoning and external irritations.

**GROUND-CHERRY, JAPANESE LANTERN CHINESE LANTERN PLANT** [*Physalis spp.*]. These are low branching plants often cultivated as an ornamental. The leaves and unripe fruit are poison. They affect heart rate, perspiration cause drowsiness, trembling and other circulatory disturbances.

**HOLLY** [*Ilex spp.*] These are ornamental trees and shrubs, and the berries are poison. Symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. They are especially dangerous to small children.

**HORSE CHESTNUT, BUCKEYE** [*Aesculus spp.*] These are common shade and ornamental trees or shrubs. All parts are poison. They cause nervous twitching, weakness, lack of coordination, dilated pupils, vomiting, diarrhea, depression, paralysis and stupor. They may be fatal.

**HYDRANGEA** [*Hydrangea spp.*] These are deciduous ornamental shrubs of vines with large flower clusters. Poison parts are the leaves, branches and buds. They cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. They may affect the heart causing staggering, rapid breathing, excitation, convulsions and possibly death.

**IRIS, FLAG** [*Iris spp.*] This is very familiar garden or wild perennial plant. Poison parts are the leaves and rhizomes. They cause severe but not serious stomach upset. The rootstalk can cause dermatitis.

**JIMSONWEED, THORNAPPLE, JAMESTOWN WEED, STINKWEED** [*Datura stramonium.*] These are common annual weeds. All parts are poison, especially the seeds and leaves. They cause abnormal thirst, dilated pupils, nausea, hallucinations, delirium, convulsions, rapid pulse, high blood pressure and coma. The leaves and flowers can cause dermatitis on contact.

**JUNIPER, RED CEDAR** [*Juniperus Virginians*] These are common evergreen trees. The leaves are the Darts to avoid. They can cause skin irritation.

**LADY'S SLIPPER** [*Cypripedina*] These are found in woodland orchards. The leaves and stems are the evil parts. They cause skin irritation.

**LATANA, RED SAGE** [*Latana camra*] These are southern perennial shrubs and northern ornamentals. All parts are poisonous, especially the fruits. They cause vomiting, diarrhea, muscular weakness, rapid heartbeat, difficulty in breathing, kidney damage, and circulatory collapse. They may be fatal.

**LILY OF THE VALLEY** [*Convallaria majlis.*] These are fragrant spring blooming perennials. The parts to avoid are the roots, leaves, berries, and flowers. It is a heart stimulant. Symptoms include irregular heartbeat and pulse, and digestive upset. Large amounts cause mental confusion, circulatory collapse and may be fatal.

**LUPINE, BLUEBONNET** [*Lupinus*] These are shrubby or herbaceous perennials or annuals. All parts, especially the unripe seeds are poisonous. The toxicity varies as to species. Symptoms are labored breathing, nervous excitation, convulsions, and coma.

**MAYAPPLE, MANDRAKE** [*Podophyllum peltatum*] This is a herbaceous perennial with thick, fibrous roots. The green fruit, roots, and foliage are the poisonous parts. They cause vomiting and diarrhea. However, the ripe fruit is edible.

**MILKWEED** [*Asclepias spp*] This is a coarse, erect, perennial weed found in fields and along roadsides. The leaves, stems, and sap are the poison parts. Symptoms are stomach and intestinal upset. They may be dangerous to children if eaten in quantity. The immature seedpod in some species is edible if cooked.

**MISTLETOE** [*Phoradendron spp*] This is a woody, semiparasitic evergreen. The berries are poison. Symptoms are acute stomach and intestinal irritation, diarrhea, and slow pulse. They may be fatal.

**MONKSHOOD, ACONITE, WOLFSBANE** [*Aconitum spp.*] These are showey perennial wildflowers. All parts are poison, especially the roots and seed. They cause vomiting, diarrhea, muscular weakness, spasms, paralysis of the respiratory system, convulsions, etc. They may be fatal.

**MORNING GLORY** [*Ipomosa Purpurea*] This is a common colorful twining vine often grown as an ornamental. The seeds are poison. The seeds have an LSD-like effect causing digestive upset and hallucinations when ingested in quantity. They may result in stupor, coma, and /or death.

**NARCISSUS, DAFFODIL, JONQUIL** [*Narcissus spp.*] These are common spring flowering perennials. All parts are poisonous, especially the bulbs. Symptoms are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and severe poisoning results in stupor, convulsions, and possible death. One bulb can be fatal.

**NETTLE, STINGING NETTLE** [*Urtica spp.*] These are tall annual or perennial bristle seeds. The nettle hairs are the parts to avoid. Symptoms are itching, burning, and skin inflammation. It is a good potherb when cooked but care must be taken when collecting.

**NIGHTSHADE, BLACK NIGHTSHADE, DEADLY NIGHTSHADE** [*Solanum*] These are annual herbs or woody shrub-like plants, with a conspicuous berry. All parts, especially the unripe berries, are poisonous. A toxic dose produces intense digestive upset, rapid heartbeat, dilated pupils, depression of the central nervous system, and may be fatal.

**OLEANDER** [*Nerium Oleander*] This is an ornamental evergreen tree or shrub. All parts are poisonous, especially the fruit. It affects the heart, producing digestive upset, bloody diarrhea, weak pulse, dizziness, dilated pupils, drowsiness, lung paralysis, coma, and death. Severe poisoning can result from using branches as skaters.

**PHEASANT'S EYE, SPRING ADONIS** [*Adonis vernalis*] This is a commonly cultivated perennial ornamental. The leaves and stem are the poisonous parts. Symptoms are nervousness, stomach upset, and depression. It may be fatal in large quantities.

**POISON HEMLOCK** [*Conium maculatum*] This is a tall biennial, carrot and parsley look-alike. All parts, especially the seeds and roots, are poisonous. Symptoms are vomiting, diarrhea, muscular weakness, trembling, dilated pupils, weak pulse, respiratory failure, and coma. IT MAY BE FATAL.

**POISON IVY, POISON OAK, POISON SUMAC** [*Rhus spp.*] These are common moody vines, shrubs, or trees. All parts are poisonous, especially the leaves, and even smoke from burning them. They cause rash and itching, and the severity varies, depending on the individual's sensitivity to them. They may be fatal if ingested.

**POKE, POKEWEED, INKBERRY** [*Phytolacca Americana*] This is large shrublike weed common to open fields, roadsides, and old house places. All parts are poisonous, especially the rootstock. Cooked young shoots are edible, but raw leaves and berries can

cause severe stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty in breathing, weakness, spasms, convulsions, and death.

**POPPY, OPIUM POPPY, ORNAMENTAL POPPY** [*Papaver Somniferum*] These are erect annual herbs, all parts of which are poisonous. The unripe fruit causes stupor, shallow breath, and coma. Other parts cause digestive upset and nervous symptoms.

**POTATO, IRISH POTATO, WHITE POTATO** [*Solanum Tuberosum*] This is a common garden vegetable, the sprouts, leaves, shoots, and green tubers, being the parts to avoid. They cause digestive upset, numbness, paralysis, dilated pupils, and circulatory and respiratory depression. They may be fatal.

**PRIVET, PRIM** [*Ligustrum Vulgate*] This is a common ornamental shrub or hedge. All parts are poisonous. Symptoms are severe digestive upset and disturbances, low blood pressure, possible kidney damage, and it may be fatal.

**RHODODENDRON, AZALEA, LAUREL** [*Rhododendron spp.*] These are woody evergreen and deciduous shrubs. All parts, especially foliage, increased saliva, nasal discharge, acute digestive upset, depression of heart and nervous system, paralysis, stupor. May be fatal.

**RHUBARB** [*Rheum Rhaponticum*] This is a perennial garden plant grown for its edible leaf-stalks. The leaves and roots are the poison parts. They contain calcium oxalate crystals. Symptoms are burning and irritation of the mouth and tongue, nausea and vomiting. They may be fatal if the tongue and throat swell to block air passages. They may also cause dermatitis.

**ROSARY PEA, PRECATORY BEAN, JEQUIRITY BEAN, INDIAN LICORICE, PRAYER BEAD, CRAP'S-EYE** [*Abrus precatorius.*] They are woody perennial vines of the tropics; the colorful seeds of which are often made into jewelry and decorations. The seeds are the poisonous parts. Symptoms are nausea, weakness, vomiting, abdominal cramps, severe diarrhea, cold sweat, drowsiness, circulatory and respiratory failures, coma and death. One seed can be fatal and poison can be taken into the system even by a cut finger.

**ST. JOHN'S-WART** [*Hypericum Perforatum*] This is a common perennial weed, the leaves of which are poisonous. They cause skin irritation and may be very toxic if eaten.

**SCOTCHBROOM** [*Cytisus scoparius*] This is a tall brushy deciduous shrub, the seeds of which are poison. They affect the central nervous system, causing excitation.

**SPURGE, POINSETTA, SNOW-ON-THE-MOUNTAIN.** [*Euphorbia spp.*] There are numerous species of this upright or prostrate herb or shrub. The milky sap of the leaves and stem are the parts to avoid. The sap may cause severe blistering and burning of the eyes and skin. Ingestion may result in acute irritation of the mouth, throat, and stomach, and cause diarrhea. It may be fatal.

**SWEET PEA** (Ornamental) [*Lathyrus spp.*] This is a common cultivated annual. The seeds are poisonous. They may cause bone deformities, paralysis, weak pulse, shallow breathing and convulsions. Can be fatal in large quantities.

**TOMATO** [*Lycopersicon esculentum*] This is a very common garden plant. The vines and leaves are poisonous. Symptoms being, digestive upset, nervous effects, cardiac depression and may cause dermatitis. It may be fatal if ingested in quantity.

**WISTERIA** This is an ornamental tree or small shrub. The seedpods are the poisonous parts. Symptoms are mild to severe digestive upset. Children may be poisoned by one or two seeds.

**YELLOW JASMINE, CAROLINA JASAMINE** [*Gelsemium sempervirens*] This is a tall, woody evergreen vine often grown as an ornamental. All parts are poison; symptoms are sweating profusely, muscular weakness, shallow breathing, convulsions, depression, and paralysis. It may be fatal. The flowers, leaves and roots cause dermatitis.

**YEW, GROUND HEMLOCK** [*Taxus spp*] These are evergreen shrubs or small trees used for ornamental hedges. All parts are poisonous especially the seeds. Symptoms are vomiting, diarrhea, trembling, dilated pupils, breathing difficulties, rapid collapse, convulsions, and coma. Fatal if taken in quantity. The berry pulp is edible.

## **WAYS TO AVOID PLANT POISONING**

Never eat any part of an unknown plant, no matter where you get it. Never attempt to make your own tea from any plant until you have positively identified it. Make sure that the herbs you are growing are not deadly look-alikes. Instruct your children about the dangers of poisonous plants, and teach them to keep unknown flowers, seeds, and berries, as well as leaves, out of their mouths.

Be certain that you know that the branch you cut to use as a skewer for that wiener roast is one that is not poisonous. Store poisonous plants and bulbs out of the reach of children. Don't assume that a plant is edible because you see other animals eating them, and don't believe that cooking poisonous plants will automatically de-toxify them.

## **IF POISONING DOES OCCUR, FOLLOW THESE STEPS:**

Immediately call a physician, hospital emergency room, or poison control center. Report the name of the plant, the quantity and parts ingested, how long ago the poisoning occurred, and the age of the victim.

Save all evidence that might identify the plant. If no physician is available to give you specific instructions, have the victim drink plenty of water. Induce vomiting by gently tickling the back of the throat with a finger, spoon, or similar blunt object, or by giving an emetic such as warm salt water, soapy water, or Syrup of Ipecac. Syrup of Ipecac is available at any pharmacy.

Most doctors recommend that you keep an ounce of Ipecac in your medicine chest at all times. The American Medical Association recommends that you use a dosage of two tablespoons for an adult, one tablespoon for children under 12 years of age, and two teaspoons for infants under one year. Follow this by one or two glasses of water or milk. By all means, do not induce vomiting or give liquids if the victim is unconscious or convulsing. Keep the patient comfortable and administer artificial respiration if necessary. Take the victim and the plants to the nearest hospital as soon as possible.