

Pretty but Dangerous

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Cooperative Extension Service

Horticulture & Ag Profitability for Sheridan & Johnson County

12/20/2010

There are more than 700 plant species in the United States, which are known to be poisonous, however the degree of toxicity varies depending on plant type and quantity of toxic substances. Most people are skin sensitive to poison ivy, however there are many other plants which can cause similar problems to some sensitive people. The time of the year or weather conditions can also play a part in the toxicity of certain plants or plant parts.

Ingestion of holly, four-o'clock, or soapwort can cause nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. While digesting large quantities of daffodils and dahlias can be toxic. Most plants or plant parts in the nightshade (Solanaceae) family is highly toxic and the bright berries of this plant can be a real problem with kids.

While some parts of plants can be edible and other parts can be poisonous, such as potato tubers are edible but the leaves, stems, sprouts and green tubers are poisonous. Same for the tomato and eggplant the fruit is edible but the rest of the plant is poisonous. The stem of rhubarb is edible but the leaves are poisonous. The fruit of apricot, peach, nectarine, cherry and chokecherry is edible however, the seeds are poisonous and parts of the plant are poisonous. The leaves especially in the spring of chokecherry are poisonous to livestock and the limbs of any cherry should not be used for marshmallow roasting or for kabobs.

Plants in the nightshade family such as Datura - Jimson weed and Common Thornapple is poisonous, with all the parts of these plants being highly toxic. The Delphinium or Larkspur family are poisonous not only to humans but also animals particularly livestock. The Digitalis or Foxglove & Lily-Of-Valley families are poisonous including all parts of the plant including the water from vases. These plants are where the potential heart medicine is made from. All parts of the Monkshood plant are poisonous and should not be planted close to vegetables as the roots can potentially pick up this poison.

Some bulbs such as tulips, daffodils and autumn crocus, daylilies can cause problems for pets if they eat them. The houseplants schefflera or philodendron can cause real problems for pets. Onions can cause nausea and anemia to pets especially cats. Do not use cocoa bean mulch around pets as this too can cause problems. The bark or flower buds from hydrangeas are poisonous to dogs.

Two common houseplants which are very toxic to people and pets are Dieffenbachia and lilies. Kids and most pets are smaller and therefore require less plant material ingested to cause poisoning. Also a factor in any poisoning or health risk is the age, weight and health condition of the individual. However if the situation is presented you should call your physician or the national poison control center at 1-800-222-1222, which can answer your questions. There is also several books or material on the internet which will discuss the various toxicity of plants, including many University publications including those of Vermont, Montana and Cornell Extension services.

Either all of these plants can be planted in the house or outdoors, however certain precautions should be considered in the placement of the plants. Certainly, in public places including front yards one should be prudent in the placement of these plants or the allowing pets or kids to roam unsupervised. By placing other plants or physical barriers in front of these plants will help prevent accidental poisoning.

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