

POISONOUS PLANTS

HUMBER NURSERIES "GREEN THUMB GUIDE"



The word 'poison' is often interpreted as a deadly substance which, if ingested, causes death. A more suitable definition for our purpose, however, is a substance that has any adverse health effect.

By this definition, the effects of poisonous plants can range from mild skin irritation to death. Contact with poison ivy, for example, may cause irritation while the ingestion of Ricin, the principal toxin in the Castor Bean, even in minute quantities, will cause death. There are many types of harmful substances to be found in plants.

Plant poisonings are preventable by the exercise of a little common sense and judgment. Prevention is the best antidote for poisonings and here is a simple five-step strategy which anyone can use:

- (1) **Identify** your plants
- (2) **Learn** which plants are poisonous, and which are not
- (3) **Display** plants safely
- (4) **Teach** children never to eat non-food plants (either indoors or outdoors)
- (5) **Prepare** for emergencies



Castor Bean
Ricinus communis

PLANT IDENTIFICATION

If you cannot identify the plants in and around your home and garden, you cannot know whether they are dangerous or not. Qualified horticulturists can often help you identify plants, at which time you should write the names down (preferably on tags attached to the plants) and keep them on hand for future reference.

It is extremely important that you know the botanical or Latin names of your plants. Some plants have several different common names, resulting in inevitable confusion. Botanical names are the only sure way to be certain of identity, since by international scientific agreement, only one botanical name is assigned to each plant species.

One method of identifying plants correctly is to purchase only plants with the botanical name attached. Other methods include visual identification by horticulturists, arborists or florists. In addition colour photographs are often available in bookstores, libraries and on the internet.

WHICH PLANTS ARE DANGEROUS?

Once you have identified your plants by botanical name, simple research will enable classification by relative toxicity. Your regional Poison Control Centre, library and the internet are reliable sources of this information.

If there is any doubt the identity of any plant, always assume it is highly toxic and act accordingly. Remember, for example, that many deaths occur each year as a result of eating poisonous wild mushrooms – very similar to a common food plant, but deadly nonetheless.

FIRST AID

It is advisable to keep first aid supplies and information necessary in an emergency on hand. For plant poisonings, the two most important first aid supplies are:

- Syrup of ipecac
 - Activated charcoal
- } (readily available from local pharmacies)

Keep these supplies handy for timely use in an emergency, but **always** consult with your Poison Control Centre before administering them.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY:

- Keep calm and keep the person calm
- Be alert for adverse reactions or symptoms (which should be reported to a health professional)
- Determine how much material has been ingested
- Call your Poison Control Centre (in the Greater Toronto Area 416-813-5900) and follow their directions
- If the situation appears to be critical, call **911**
- If directed to a hospital, take the plant (or part of it) with you

Humber Nurseries works with the Poison Control Centre in the Greater Toronto Area to help identify plants. The list of potentially dangerous plants is too extensive to be included here but **some** common plants which require caution or extreme caution are listed below.



Ricinus communis



Caladium x hortulanum



Delphinium hybrid

COMMON NAMES (S)	BOTANICAL NAME	POISONOUS OR TOXIC PARTS
Castor Bean Castor Oil Plant Palma Christi	<i>Ricinus communis</i> " " " " " " " "	Seeds, possibly leaves
Black Nightshade	<i>Solanum nigrum</i> <i>Solanum americanum</i>	Berries, leaves
Jimsonweed Angel's Trumpet Devil's Trumpet Downy Thornapple	<i>Datura metel</i> <i>Datura suaveolens</i> " " " " " " " "	Entire plant, especially leaves, seeds
Rhubarb	<i>Rheum rhabarbarum</i>	Leaves
Caladium Angel Wings	<i>Caladium species</i> " " " "	Entire plant
Monkshood Friar's Cap Helmet Flower Wolfsbane Soldier's Cap	<i>Aconitum napellus</i> " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "	Entire plant
Delphinium Larkspur	<i>Delphinium species</i> " " " "	Entire plant
Nicotine Flowering Tobacco	<i>Nicotiana species</i> " " " "	Entire plant, especially leaves



Aconitum napellus



Nicotiana glauca

For additional reading on this subject, refer to your local library. The Canadian Poisonous Plants information system (www.cbif.gc.ca/pls/pp/poison) is also a valuable source of information.

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