
PLANTS

How are people most frequently poisoned by plants?

Can you get poisoned by touching a plant?

I found my child eating a poisonous plant. I was able to take it away but he had already swallowed some. How much does it take to become ill?

What are common poisonous plants found in Arizona?

How are people most frequently poisoned by plants?

Most plant poisonings occur because a plant is ingested. Poisonous plants are sometimes mistaken for edible species, or children ingest a plant not realizing it will harm them. Sometimes people ingest a plant intentionally for the purpose of getting some medicinal effect.

Can you get poisoned by touching a plant?

Plants which contain the toxin urushiol oil may produce an itchy rash in sensitive people. These plants include poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. While the rash is not contagious, if the urushiol oil is still on the skin or clothing, touching it to another body part can cause a rash to develop there.

I found my child eating a poisonous plant. I was able to take it away, but not until after some had been swallowed. Do I need to worry?

The amount of plant required to produce illness varies depending on the particular plant and part ingested. Children often get into poisonous houseplants, which cause irritation to their tongue and mouth when chewed, often limiting the amount they ingest and preventing more serious illness and injury. There are some plants, however, which can cause great harm even when only small amounts are consumed. For example, ingesting only a few small seeds of Jimson Weed, or chewing a small amount of Castor Bean(s) or Rosary Pea(s) can result in serious poisoning and may be life-threatening. Ingesting even a small piece of water hemlock root can result in violent seizures and death. Similarly, small amounts of oleander can cause an abnormal heart rate and rhythm. When in doubt it is recommended to call a Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

What are common poisonous plants found in Arizona?

Jimsonweed: Also known as Devil's Trumpet, Angel's Trumpet and Sacred Thorn Apple, this plant has large white or purple trumpet-shaped flowers and spiky seed pods. Ingesting even small amounts of the plant or seeds can result in confusion, frightening hallucinations, the inability to urinate or sweat, overheating, and a rapid heart rate. Depending on the amount ingested, these troubling symptoms can last hours to many days, and in some cases can lead to death. Some other plants which contain similar toxins include mandrake, belladonna, and henbane. The toxins in these plants are scopolamine (used in medications for motion sickness), atropine, and related chemicals.

Oleander: This common shrub contains chemicals similar to the heart medication digoxin, and all parts of the plant are poisonous. Even small amounts of the plant or a tea made from the plant can cause poisoning, which includes nausea, vomiting, and an abnormal heart beat which can be deadly. Some other plants which contain similar toxins include Foxglove, Red Squill, and Lily of the Valley.

Water Hemlock: This is the most common lethal plant ingestion in the United States. The plant usually grows in marshy areas by water, has many small white flowers, and has a complex chambered root. Unfortunately the plant is often mistaken for turnip, parsley, and parsnip. The whole plant is toxic with the root containing the greatest amount of toxin. Only a few bites of the root may lead to nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, sweating, salivation, low blood pressure, slowing of the heart rate, coma, and violent seizures.

Castor Bean: The castor bean plant is large, leafy, and contains brownish-colored seed pods, each containing 3 castor beans. While the seeds contain ricin, an extremely potent toxin, the seed must be opened or crushed to release the toxin. People who ingest a whole, intact seed usually do not become ill. However, if seeds are chewed or the poison is extracted from the plant, a person's organs will shut down and death may occur within a few days. A similar toxin, abrin, is contained in the black and red ornamental seeds commonly referred to as Rosary Peas or Jequirty Beans. Similarly, whole intact seeds cause no significant toxicity, but seeds with a broken outer capsule may poison a person who ingests them.

Peyote: This small cactus contains the toxin mescaline. Ingestion of peyote causes nausea, vomiting, hallucinations, increased blood pressure, and a fast heart rate.

Deffenbachia: This is a common indoor plant which contains microscopic needle-like crystals in the leaves which cause irritation when a leaf is broken open. The most common way people, especially toddlers, are exposed to this plant is by biting into a leaf. Many other plants contain these microscopic crystals, including Alocasia and Philodendron

Chinaberry: This tree has little yellow berries and small white and purple flowers. While the berries are most commonly ingested, all parts of the plant contain the toxin, meliatoxin. After consuming parts of this plant people experience nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort and diarrhea which may even contain blood.

Mormon Tea: This plant contains the stimulant ephedra, and when consumed as a plant or tea may cause agitation, a fast heart rate, and elevated blood pressure.

Mescal Bean Bush: This leafy plant with complex purple flowers has woody pods which contain red seeds. It is also known as "Texas Mountain Laurel". The toxin in this plant is cytisine, which is similar to nicotine. If the seeds are chewed, this plant may cause nausea, vomiting, hallucinations, a fast heart rate, muscle weakness, and seizures. Similar toxicity can occur when plants or seeds with similar nicotine-like substances in them are ingested (e.g. desert tobacco, poison hemlock).