Jennifer J. Knutson

C:\Users\Jennifer\Pictures\extension logo 2.png

Master Gardener

**Beware! Within the Plant Kingdom Lurks Evil**

**Introduction**

We sometimes approach our gardens and the plants we encounter in nature with a naïve sort of trust; however, there are many common plants found in the house and outdoors in the garden, woods or fields, which can cause problems if eaten, or handled. It is important to know the common and botanical names of all your plants, whether they are indoors or outside. Someday the plant kingdom’s dark side may make itself known to you and when it does – be prepared!

**Plant Reactions**

Effects: allergic reaction, skin irritations, illness, death

What happens depends upon:

* Toxicity of plant
* The parts contacted
* Time of year
* Stage of growth
* Amount of material with which the person has come into contact
* Age, weight and sensitivity of the person

**Poisonous Plants in the Garden (discussed in the presentation)**

*Aconitum* (Monkshood)

*Dicentra* (Bleeding Heart)

*Delphinium*

*Lathyrus* (Sweet Pea)

*Rhododendron* (Azalea)

*Hydrangea*

*Taxus* (Yew)

**Poisonous Bulbs**

Narcissus (daffodil)

Crocus

Gladiola

Hyacinth

Iris

Scilla (squill)

Tulip

**Poisonous Houseplants (discussed in the presentation)**

*Spathiphyllum* (peace lily)

*Hedera helix* (English ivy)

*Philodendron*

*Dieffenbachia* (dumb cane)

*Ficus benjamina* (Ficus tree)

*Ficus elastica* (rubber tree)

*Euphorbia tirucalli* (pencil cactus, milkbrush)

*Solanum pseudocapsicum* (Jerusalem cherry, Christmas cherry)

**Botanical Crime Families**

* Nightshade Family
* Cashew Family
* Nettle Family
* Spurge Family
* Carrot or Parsley Family

**Solanaceae (Nightshade Family)**

* *Datura* (Angel’s Trumpet)
* *Atropa belladonna*
* Bitter nightshade
* Potatoes
* Peppers
* Eggplants
* Tomatoes
* Petunia
* Nicotiana

**Anacardiacea (Cashew or Sumac Family)**

* Mango
* Cashew
* Pistachio
* Poison Ivy
* Poison Oak
* Poison Sumac
* Ginkgo Tree

**Urticaceae (Nettle Family)**

* Light green, upright perennial
* All parts of the leaves and stems are covered with long hairs
* Stems are four-sided, ridged and grooved
* Leaves are coarsely toothed or jagged along the edges
* Leaves are opposite one another along stem
* Fibrous root system has underground stems (rhizomes)
* New plants can grow from rhizomes
* Wear protective clothing when handling

**Euphorbiaceae(Spurge Family)**

* Euphorbia
* Poinsettia
* Pencil cactus
* Castor bean
* Rubber tree

Plants that produce a milky sap should be handled with care, as they may burn skin and eyes.

**Apiaceae(Parsley and Carrot Family)**

**Phototoxic plants**:

* Carrots
* Dill
* Fennel
* Parsley
* Anise
* Lovage
* Chervil
* Parsnips
* Caraway
* Coriander
* Angelica
* Celery

**Dangerous wild plants**:

* Water hemlock
* Poison hemlock
* Giant hogweed
* Cow parsnip

**Poison hemlock description:**

* Leaves are triangular, dark green, very lacy and fern-like
* Stems are hollow between nodes, ridged and hairless with purple spots and blotches
* Flowers are white with five notched petals arranged in an umbel (umbrella shape) approximately 2-3 inches across.

**Water hemlock symptoms of poisoning**:

* Stomach pains
* Nausea
* Diarrhea
* Dilation of the pupils
* Violent convulsions sometimes accompanied by frothing at the mouth

What should you do if poisoned?

If emetics, followed by purgatives, are administered soon enough so that vomiting can be induced, the person has a chance for recovery. Otherwise death can be sudden and is likely to occur during the convulsions.

**Some Poisonous Plants in the Minnesota Landscape**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Common Name**  **Botanical Name** | **Toxic Part** | **Contact (C) or Ingested (I)** |
| Azaleas *(Rhododendron spp.)* | All parts | I |
| Bleeding Heart *(Dicentra spp.)* | All parts | I |
| Buttercup *(Ranunculus spp.)* | All parts, esp. flowers | C |
| Cherry *(Prunus spp.)* | Seeds, bark, leaves | I |
| Crocus, autumn  *(Colchicum autumnale)* | Bulbs, flowers | I |
| Clematis *(Clematis spp.)* | Leaves | C |
| Columbine *(Aquilegia spp.)* | Roots | I |
| Elderberry *(Sambucus spp.)* | All parts | I |
| English Ivy *(Hedera helix)* | Leaves, fruit | I |
| Foxglove *(Digitalis purpurea)* | Flowers, seeds, leaves | I |
| Gingko *(Gingko biloba)* | Fruit | I |
| Horseradish *(Armoracia lapathifolia)* | Leaves | I |
| Hyacinths *(Hyacinthus spp.)* | Bulbs | I |
| Hydrangea *(Hydrangea spp.)* | Leaves, buds | I |
| Iris *(Iris spp.)* | Rhizomes | I |
| Juniper *(Juniperus*  *communis, J. virginiana)* | Fruit | C, I |
| Larkspur *(Delphinium spp.)* | Young plants, seeds | I |
| Lily of the Valley  *(Convallaria majalis)* | All parts | I |
| Lobelia *(Lobelia inflata)* | Leaves, seeds | I |
| Lupine *(Lupinus spp.)* | All parts | I |
| Narcissus | Bulbs | I |
| Nightshade *(Solanum spp.)* | Fruit | I |
| Peas, sweet *(Lathyrus spp.)* | Petals, seeds | I |
| Plums *(Prunus spp.)* | Seeds, bark, leaves | I |
| Poison Ivy *(Toxicodendron spp.)* | All parts | C |
| Potato *(Solanum tuberosum)* | Green portions, fruit | I |
| Rhododendron *(Rhododendron)* | All parts | I |
| Rhubarb *(Rheum rhaponticum)* | Leaf blades | I |
| Tobacco *(Nicotiana spp.)* | Leaves | I |
| Tomato *(Lycopersicon esculentum)* | Leaves | I |
| Yew*(Taxus spp.)* | Fruit and foliage | I |

More information on poisonous plants can be found at:

<http://www.wisconsinpoison.org/Poison-Center1/Educators/Plant_Booklet_2007.pdf>

<http://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/pubs/oh20.htm>

Information on Poison Hemlock in Minnesota can be found at:

<http://www.myminnesotawoods.umn.edu/poisonhemlock/>

Minnesota Poison Control Center



**REFERENCES**

* Gough, R.E. (2010). *Poisonous Plants in the Home Landscape*, Montana State University Extension.
* Kommedahl, Thor (1989). *Pesky Plants*. Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota.
* *Safe and Poisonous Garden Plants* (2012). University of California Davis.
* Stewart, Amy (2009). *Wicked Plants*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.