

Toxic & Poisonous Landscape Plants

Plants are everywhere. And we as gardeners are constantly on the lookout for new and interesting plants that can bring value, beauty, and interest to our landscapes. While most of the plants we choose appear to be harmless, some can potentially become a problem. More specifically, many can be either toxic or poisonous to adult humans and pets. And, for young children, a plant's lush/shiny leaves and/or bright berries can become attractive to them and tempting to taste or eat.

While the terms poisonous and toxic generally used interchangeably, there is a difference. Toxins can be produced biologically and synthetically. They can afflict health processes and even cause death when taken into the system in small amounts. On the other hand, poisons are toxins that are absorbed, inhaled, or ingested. So, direct contact, breathing in (e.g., during burning), chewing, or consuming plant parts must be avoided.

Poisonous chemicals vary from plant to plant. Their effects may also range by dose and differ among humans and pets. So, we must be both informed and careful. Let's look at some common plants that could become potential problems, then delve into what can be done about preventing unnecessary exposure.

Some of the more common toxic or poisonous landscape plants include:

- Amaryllis
- Autumn Crocus
- Azalea
- Boxwood
- Caladium
- Castor Bean
- Daffodil
- English Ivy
- Foxglove
- Hemlocks
- Holly

- Hyacinth
- Hydrangea
- Lantana
- Larkspur
- Lily-Of-The-Valley
- Mistletoe
- Moon Flower (Loco Weed)
- Morning Glory
- Mountain Laurel
- Mushrooms
- Narcissus (Poet's)
- Oleander
- Poison: Ivy, Oak, Sumac
- Pokeweed
- Purple Nightshade
- Rhododendron
- Rhubarb (raw)
- Stinging Nettle
- Tulips
- Wisteria
- Yellow Iris
- Yews

And some of the more common toxic or poisonous household plants include:

- Cardboard Palm
- Cyclamen
- Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane)
- Dracaena
- Peace Lily
- Philodendron
- Pothos (Devil's Ivy)
- Sago Palm

Be aware that the above are limited lists and there are other poisonous plants beyond these. But knowledge is power. While the above lists may seem daunting and potentially keep you from enjoying your time outdoors, simply being knowledgeable about your landscaping and houseplants will keep you and your pets safe. In addition, there are further precautions and steps that you can take.

Precautions To Take Beforehand

- Education is the first step to prevention. Know the plants in your yard and landscape.
- Instruct young children not to put any plant part in their mouth unless it is part of a meal. Keep seeds, berries, and bulbs away from pets and children.
- Remove all mushrooms from your yard.
- Do not make hot dog or marshmallow roasting sticks from unknown bushes.
- Do not burn poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac. The associated smoke carries urushiol in the air and is just as harmful as the plant itself.
- Remember plants that appear to be safe for birds and animals may very well be poisonous to humans.

Prevention During Potential Exposure

- Wear long sleeves, long pants, boots, and gloves.
- Consider applying barrier skin creams or lotions.
- Do not eat any plant part you do not recognize as edible, chew on items made from imported beans or seeds, or make teas or brews from plants if you are not sure they are safe to use.

Smart Moves After Exposure

- Immediately rinse skin with dishwashing soap or detergent and lots of cool water. For poison ivy, oak, or sumac exposure, rinse with rubbing alcohol

(a solvent that neutralizes urushiol). If used within four hours of exposure, it will leach urushiol out of the skin. Rinse frequently so that wash solutions do not dry on the skin and further spread the urushiol.

- Wash exposed clothing separately and thoroughly with hot water and detergent.
- Clean tools with rubbing alcohol or soap and lots of water.

Steps To Take If Exposed

- Remove any remaining portions of the plant from the mouth; do NOT induce vomiting.
- Remove contaminated clothing and wash skin well with soap and water.
- Save any remaining pieces of the plant (in a Ziploc bag) or mushroom (in a brown paper sack).
- Do not wait for symptoms to appear. For humans, immediately contact the Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug information at (800) 222-1222; for pets, contact the ASPCA Poison Hotline at (888) 426-4435 or your veterinarian.
- If seeking medical treatment, take parts of the saved plant with you to aid in the identification to ensure proper treatment.

So, take the time to learn your plants so you, your family, and your pets can be safe out there.