

Commonly-found plants can be dangerous

by JUDE RAMSAY JENSEN

Given this warning from a soothsayer in ancient Rome to guard himself against danger on the 15th of March, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar chose to ignore the man and ventured into the Capitol unprotected.

A fateful day for Caesar — his best friends and most trusted allies, conspirators all — ended his reign at bladepoint. He should have listened to the soothsayer. As parents of young, inquisitive children, we would all do well to take this same warning to heart. Mid-March signals the first blooms and leaves of the year, some of which can be very dangerous, even fatal, to the uninformed youngster.

The first, early days of spring appeal to all of us. The hint of warmth, the promise of summer as the Earth's axis tips us nearer the sun, is irresistible. For some, our first inclinations are to warm up winter-weary muscles and begin working in the garden. For others, a slow walk to admire blossom and bud break satisfies the need.

Children are no exception. They are eager to explore, eager to learn about the world around them. Their senses are tuned in to the sights and smells of the season. Very young children equate the senses — smells good + looks good = tastes good. They could get into trouble if they

sample the wrong plant.

Whatever your reasons for that first foray into the garden or woods, don't go unprotected. Along with your garden tools or appreciative eye, carry with you the knowledge of which plants can be dangerous to you and your children.

Harness some of that youthful enthusiasm and take your children for a walk, pointing out the poisonous plants. Make it fun, but let them know it's not a game. A good rule to establish is to have your youngsters bring everything they pick to you for identification. If their treasured bouquet is harmless, let them enjoy it. If not, you have worked together to avoid a possible tragedy, and could still enjoy the bouquet, placed out of the reach of little hands.

The following list of dangerous-but-common plants is by no means complete, but does include many plant varieties found in our area. The list was provided by the Oregon Poison Center. The emergency number is 225-8968.

To quote Caesar, "The ides of March are come." Let's all strive to make it a safe, enjoyable, informed spring.

(List gives name of plant, the part of that plant that is toxic and the symptoms.)

House plants

Pointsettia; leaves; Fatal. One leaf can kill a child.

Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane, Elephant Ear); all parts; Intense burning and irritation of the mouth and tongue. Death can occur if the

base of the tongue swells enough to block the passage of air.

Rosary pea and Castor bean; seeds; Fatal. A single rosary pea seed has caused death. One or two Castor bean seeds are near the lethal dose for adults.

Mistletoe; berries; Fatal. Both children and adults have died from eating the berries.

Flower garden plants

Hyacinth, Daffodil and Narcissus; bulbs; Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea. May be fatal.

Larkspur; young plant, seeds; Digestive upset, nervous excitement, depression. May be fatal.

Monkshood; fleshy roots; Digestive upset, nervous excitement.

Autumn crocus, Star-of-Bethlehem; bulbs; Vomiting and nervous excitement.

Lily-of-the-Valley; leaves, flowers; Irregular heart beat and pulse, usually accompanied by digestive upset and mental confusion.

Iris; underground stems; Severe, but not usually serious digestive upset.

Bleeding Heart; foliage, roots; May be poisonous in large amounts. Has proved fatal to cattle.

Foxglove; leaves; One of the sources of the drug digitalis, used to stimulate the heart. In large amounts, the active principles cause dangerously irregular heart beat and pulse, usually digestive upset and mental confusion. May be fatal.

Vegetable garden plants

Rhubarb; leaf; Large amounts of raw or cooked leaves can cause convulsions, coma, rapidly followed by

death.

Ornamental plants

Daphne; berries; Fatal. A few berries can kill a child.

Wisteria; seeds, pods; Mild to severe digestive upset. Many children are poisoned by this plant.

Holly; berries; Ten or 12 berries will cause digestive upset, vomiting, diarrhea.

Golden Chain; seed pods; Severe poisoning. Excitement, staggering, convulsions, coma. May be fatal.

Laurels, rhododendron, azalea; all parts; Fatal. Produces nausea, vomiting, depression, difficult breathing, prostration, coma.

Yew; berries, foliage; Fatal. Foliage is more toxic than berries. Death is usually sudden, without warning symptoms.

Trees and shrubs

Wild and cultivated cherries; twigs, foliage; Fatal. Contains a compound that releases cyanide when eaten. Gasping, excitement and prostration are symptoms that often appear within minutes.

Oaks; foliage, acorns; Affects kidneys gradually. Symptoms appear only after several days or weeks. Takes large amount for poisoning. Children should not be allowed to chew on acorns.

Elderberry; all parts, except berry; Children have been poisoned using pieces of the pithy stems for blowguns. Nausea and digestive upset.

Black Locust; bark, sprouts, foliage; Children have suffered

nausea, weakness and depression after chewing bark and seeds.

Plants in swamp or moist areas

Water Hemlock; all parts; Fatal. Violent and painful convulsions. A number of people have died from hemlock.

Meadow plants

Buttercups; all parts; Irritant

juices may severely injure the digestive system.

Nightshade; all parts, especially the unripe berry; Fatal. Intense digestive disturbances and nervous symptoms.

Poison Hemlock; all parts; Fatal. Resembles a large, wild carrot. Used in ancient Greece to kill condemned prisoners.



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112 North Main Street Gresham 666-8495

Living Way sets concert

The Living Way Fellowship will hold a benefit concert on Saturday, March 23 at 7 p.m. Admission is \$2.50.

The benefit is for Carmel Knight, the cook at Bull Run School who was burned in a fire at the family's home.

It will be an evening of acoustical, gospel, folk, blue grass, reggae and rhythm and blues. Performing will be Lee Galvin, Roger Holmes, Ken Seagraves, Wayne Holmes and Bill Magreen.

Story time set for preschoolers

Preschool story time is being held in the Sandy Grade School Library once a month for 3- to 5-year-olds. Children have an opportunity to participate in storytelling sessions and puppet shows, and may view films.

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