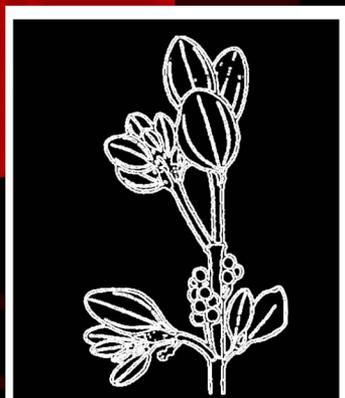


POISONOUS PLANTS



Mistletoe

.....West Virginia
Department of Agriculture

AVOID POISONOUS PLANTS

A poisonous plant is one which upsets normal health. This includes internal upsets, skin rashes or dermatitis and such things as prolonged burning sensations. This brochure lists some of the common native plants and a few household and garden plants that are capable of causing trouble. The toxicity of poisonous plants varies with the size of the victim, the stage of growth of the plant, and the amount of the plant eaten. It is necessary that a medical doctor determine the treatment in each instance. Although vomiting is mentioned as a first aid measure in some of the descriptions, it should not be induced if the victim is unconscious or in convulsions.

POISON IVY (*Rhus radicans* L.)

This vigorous woody vine or shrub is the most common of all poisonous plants in the State. An old statement "Leaflets three, let it be" is still good advice because the only certain defense against this pest is to recognize it and to stay away from it. The common vine with 5 leaflets at a place is the harmless Virginia creeper.

A person may acquire a skin rash by touching broken parts of the poison ivy plant or by contact with shoes, clothing, tools, or animals that have been in contact with broken plants. Unbroken stems and leaves are not covered with the poisonous substance and it is not given off in the air. Burning poison ivy, however, is dangerous because small droplets of the poison are carried along on the soot particles. Some of the worst cases of ivy poisoning have started from inhalation of, or contact with, smoke from burning vines.



MUSHROOMS

Several of the mushrooms growing wild in West Virginia are poisonous. In fact, many of the common edible varieties may cause acute indigestion or illness if they are improperly prepared or if they are gathered after they have started to deteriorate. There is no reliable way of determining whether or not a particular mushroom is poisonous; so it is foolhardy to rely on tests you may have heard about. The only safe way is to consult someone who knows.

WATER HEMLOCK

(*Cicuta maculata* L.)

Water hemlock is common along moist ditches and at the margins of swamps in every county of the State. The much branched stem is hollow and the large, dark-green conspicuously - veined leaves have coarse, sharp teeth along the margins. The cluster of spindle-shaped roots are internally chambered, contain a yellowish oil-like liquid and supposedly have a sweetish taste.

The active poison is a resinous material called cicutoxin.

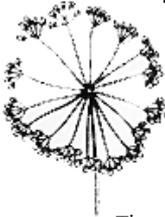
It occurs primarily in the roots, but it is also present in the young leaves.

The death of a boy at Culloden, Cabell County from eating a root of

this plant was reported in the *West Virginia Market Bulletin* for September 1, 1934 (Vol. 19, No. 10). The root was presumably mistaken for a parsnip.

Symptoms of poisoning are similar in man and animals.

They are nausea, dilated pupils, vomiting, delirium, violent convulsions, and death.



WISTERIA

(*Wisteria* spp.)



Children have reportedly been poisoned in other States by eating the seeds or pods of this commonly cultivated vine.

CASTOR BEAN

(*Ricinus communis* L.)

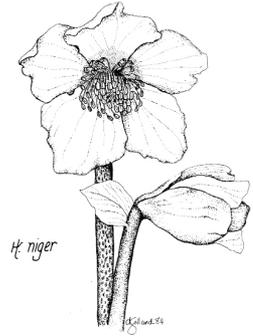


The Castor plant is grown as an ornamental in West Virginia. The seeds contain a toxic principle called ricin which is deadly in infinitesimal amounts. Children should not have access to this plant. Symptoms are nausea, vomiting, intestinal cramps, and perhaps convulsions. First aid is to have the victim vomit.

CHRISTMAS ROSE

(*Helleborus niger* L.)

All parts of this commonly grown ornamental contain glycosides and thus are poisonous. Children may be attracted to the bright blossoms. A dermatitis may result from contact with broken or bruised parts of the plant.



POKEWEED

(*Phytolacca americana* L.)

Pokeweed or poke is a common weed that grows on rich waste soils throughout the State. The toxic principle is not well known, but it is thought to be a saponin and one or more alkaloids.

Symptoms attributed to pokeweed poisoning are a burning sensation in the mouth and throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. A weakened pulse, drowsiness and impaired vision precede death in extreme cases.

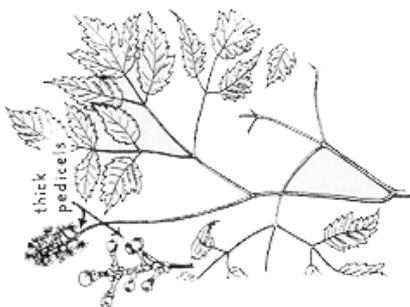
Poisoning usually results from eating pieces of the root accidentally collected with "greens." The root is the most poisonous part of the plant, but mature stems and leaves also contain slight amounts of the poison. The pulp of the fruit is not poisonous and the young shoots (up to 6 inches high) are an excellent pot herb when properly prepared. First aid is to have the victim vomit. A doctor treats for circulatory and respiratory depression.



WHITE BANEBERRY

(*Actaea pachypoda* Ell.)

This perennial herb occurs naturally in the rich woods of several West Virginia counties and both it and the red baneberry (*A. rubra* (Ait.) Willd.) are grown in flower gardens. An essential oil in the attractive berries reportedly causes marked irritation of the intestinal tract, nausea, vomiting and dizziness. Fatalities have not been reported. First aid is to have the patient vomit.



DUMBCANE

(*Dieffenbachia* sp.)

This plant is often used as an ornamental in homes. Small children have been known to tear pieces from the leaves and to attempt to eat them. The intense burning sensation that results may last for several days. One woman reported that a severe dermatitis resulted from the expressed juice that she contacted while removing a stalk of the plant.



MISTLETOE

(*Phoradendron serotinum* (Raf.) M.C. Johnst.)

The white berries of this familiar Christmas ornament are considered to be poisonous and should be kept out of the way of children.



FOXGLOVE

(*Digitalis purpurea* L.)

The leaves and seeds of the common garden foxglove are very poisonous due to the glycosidal content, chiefly digitoxin, which is a heart stimulant. Symptoms are nausea, vomiting and dizziness. First aid is to have the victim vomit.



MOONSEED

(*Menispermum canadense L.*)

This woody, twining vine probably grows in every county. The black fruits hang in grapelike bunches, but they can be distinguished from grapes by the large, crescent-shaped stone that each contains.

Cases have been reported in nearby states where children were poisoned by eating the fruits of this plant. The poisonous principles are alkaloids. First aid is to have the victim vomit.



YEW

(*Taxus spp.*)

Various species of this evergreen shrub are commonly planted as ornamentals. The fruit is a bright red, fleshy, translucent cup surrounding a large seed.

The leaves, bark and seeds of the plant contain the alkaloid, taxine, and thus are deadly. The red pulp of the fruit is not particularly toxic, but the seed must be avoided. Children are often attracted to the fruits.

Yew is a common cause of poisoning in other countries. Symptoms are nausea, circulatory failure and depressed respiration. First aid is to have the victim vomit. A doctor treats for alkaloids and circulatory failure.



JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT

(*Arisaema triphyllum (L.) Schott.*)

The rhizomes of this common plant contains calcium oxalate crystals which produce an intense burning sensation in the mouth.

The rhizome is often fed to unsuspecting persons as a practical joke. One folk remedy is to rinse the mouth with vinegar, but it is not known how well this works.



BITTERSWEET

(Solanum dulcamara L.)

This introduced climbing vine is sometimes grown as an ornamental and is common in waste places throughout the State. The berries of this plant may be attractive to children and it is reported in other States that some may have been poisoned by eating them. General symptoms are a burning sensation in the throat, nausea, dilation of pupils, dizziness and perhaps convulsions. First aid is to have the victim vomit. A doctor treats for alkaloid poisoning.



HAYFEVER PLANTS

Ragweed sketch shown here

Hayfever plants, although not poisonous, are dreaded by thousands. One of the most irritating is ragweed (Ambrosia) which is nearly as common as poison ivy. It is noted for its prolific production of windborne pollen which causes most late cases of hayfever.



POISON HEMLOCK

(Conium maculatum L.)

This much-branched herb has a smooth, shiny, hollow stem covered with purple spots. The dark-green, hairless leaves are deeply cut into several segments. All parts of the plant, when crushed, smell "mousy". This odor along with the spotted stem makes the identification of this plant rather certain.



From earliest times, the poisonous properties of hemlock have been impressed upon our culture. It was the chief ingredient of the cup of poison administered to Socrates, and, throughout the ages it has been used for poisoning.

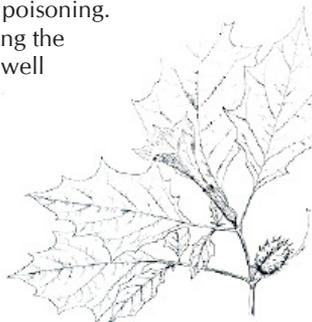
The poisonous nature of the plant is due to several alkaloids, the most important of which is coniine. All parts of the plant are toxic when green, but the alkaloids are dissipated by slow drying. The nearly ripe seeds are the most dangerous part of the plant. Human poisoning arises from mistaking fruits for anise or from children indiscriminately eating them.

The alkaloids paralyze the respiratory nerves and the victim dies of suffocation. First aid is to have the victim vomit. A doctor treats for alkaloid poisoning and to maintain respiration.

JIMSON-WEED

(*Datura stramonium L.*)

It has been reported that children have been poisoned by plucking the large-showy flowers and sucking the nectar from the base. The toxic principles are several alkaloids, similar to those found in deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*). Symptoms are pupil dilation, rapid heart action, dryness of mouth and depression of the nervous system. First aid is to have the victim vomit. A doctor treats for atropine poisoning. Poisoning reportedly has resulted from handling the leaves of the plant; so it may be well to wash well after each such exposure.



Poison Control Centers

There are 14 poison control centers in 11 cities in West Virginia that are equipped to provide treatment and/or information in cases of accidental poisoning. The names and addresses of the centers are listed in Miscellaneous publication 224 of the West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service. This publication is free upon request and should be in every home in case of an emergency.



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