

Poisonous Plants

Castor Bean



Just one tiny castor bean is enough to kill an adult within a few minutes. Castor oil is made safe (but not palatable) with the removal of the lethal compound known as ricin. Amazingly, castor bean plants are grown for decorative purpose all over the place, particularly in California.

Rosary Pea



The rosary pea may sound sweet and downright pious, but it's actually one of the most dangerous plants on earth. Its seeds contain a particular lectin known as abrin; if chewed and swallowed, death will follow shortly. The seeds are easily identified with their distinctive bright red jacket and single black dot (almost like a reverse Black Widow spider). Abrin, which does its damage by inactivating ribosomes, is one of the most fatal toxins on earth. After the vomiting, fever, nausea, drooling and G.I. dysfunction but *before* the bizarre hyperexcitability, edema and fatally convulsive seizures, renal tubular degeneration, bladder and retinal hemorrhage and widespread internal lesions typically develop.

Monkshood



The nickname for monkshood is actually “Wolfsbane”. That’s owing to its once common use by farmers as a very effective wolf extermination tool.

Bushman’s Poison



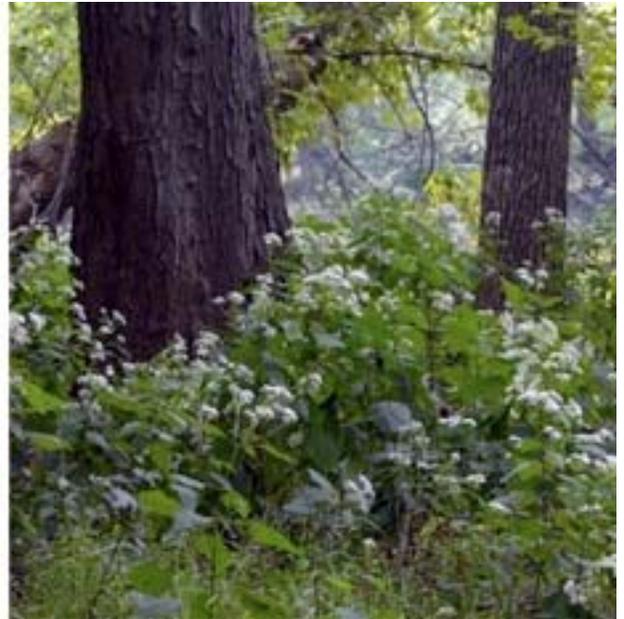
Bushman’s poison has famously been used by the Khoisan of South Africa to poison the tips of their arrows. Though the plant produces pleasantly scented flowers and a tasty plum-like berry, the milky sap can be fatal. The leaves, however, have medicinal properties. Bushman’s poison is also known as the wintersweet.

Angel's Trumpet



Related to petunias, tomatoes and potatoes, the angel's trumpet is a highly effective hallucinogen, but should not be consumed for recreational purposes, as it can also be lethal. According to wikipedia: "The active ingredients are atropine, hyoscyamine and scopolamine which are classified as deliriants, or anticholinergics. Due to the elevated risk of overdose in uninformed users, many hospitalizations, and some deaths, are reported from recreational use." This common plant also goes by many other names, including jimson weed, stink weed, loco weed, and devil's snare

Snakeroot



Snakeroot is most dangerous for livestock such as cattle and sheep. When cows consume the attractive fluffy white blooms and stems of the snakeroot, their milk and bones become saturated with the toxin tremetol and humans who consume these contaminated animal products will develop milk sickness (tremetol poisoning).

Water Hemlock



Photo of the stem. Note the purplish tinge. Also note the "glaucous" aspect of the stem - the whitish bloom which is easily wiped off. Note also the fine vertical lines running vertically along the stem. The stems are hollow.



The Water Hemlocks are the most poisonous plants in North America. All parts are deadly poisonous. Even a small mouthful can kill an adult. Therefore it stands to reason that ingesting even a little bit of the juice will make a person seriously ill. So, it is best to learn to identify these plant by sight, rather than characteristics that require you to handle it or examine the roots or inside of the stem. It is so virulently poisonous that it is best to avoid handling it at all. Most poisonings have occurred due to confusion with edible lookalikes.

Please do not rely solely on this web page for identifying these plants. Consult field guides for more detailed information. Do not handle these plants. If you do, thoroughly clean your hands immediately afterwards. Take appropriate steps to avoid accidentally ingesting any part of these plants or their juice.

It is particularly important for wilderness survival enthusiasts to learn this plant, as its stems are hollow and are therefore appear to be ideally suited for use as straws. Don't make use of this plant in this way - many poisonings have occurred in this manner.

Similar species:

- Water Parsnip - very similar, except the leaves are only once-compound
- Cowbane - Also poisonous, and closely resembles Water Parsnip.
- Mock Bishop's Weed
- Bulb-bearing Water Hemlock
- Wild Carrot (Queen Anne's Lace) - but this plant grows in dry areas
- Other members of the Parsley Family.

Height: 3-6 feet tall

Flowers: Small white flowers in a flat or rounded umbel (an umbrella-shaped cluster) 2-5" wide. Individual flowers about 1/8" wide, have 5 petals and 5 stamens.

Leaves: Alternate compound leaves with lance-shaped leaflets, pointed, with numerous teeth. Note the sometimes multiples of leaves giving rise to a somewhat haphazard arrangement of leaves along the leaf stem. Sometimes doubly compound or lobed. Sometimes tinged with red. Up to about 4" long, 1.5" wide.

Stem: Branching, smooth & stout, often mottled or solid purple. Hollow. Lower part of stem chambered. Roots have fat tuberlike branches.

Habitat: Wet open areas such as marshes, along shores, and sometimes open swamps

The poison hemlock famously drunk by Socrates is deadly, but the water hemlock is just as fatal. According to the USDA, water hemlock or poison parsnip is "the most violently toxic plant in North America". The flowers and stems are safe, but the stalky roots contain chambers that are full of a deadly sap containing the convulsant cicutoxin. Grand mal seizures are followed by a quick death if even a tiny amount is consumed.

English Yew



The English Yew, or *taxus baccata* ("taxus" meaning toxin), is one of the deadliest trees on the planet. The evergreen has a majestic and lush appearance and is fairly common in forests of Europe. The yew's primary toxin is taxine, a cardiac depressant. The yew acts rapidly and there is no antidote.

Strychnine tree



The strychnine tree's fruit seeds contain lethal levels of strychnine and brucine which cause death after painful vomiting, facial contortions and convulsions

Canada Moonseed



This vine is most often confused with Grape vines. The berries and roots are poisonous, potentially lethal. Leaves have 3-7 angles or lobes, with the smooth stalk attached just in from the heart-shaped base. This is in contrast to Grape leaves, which are attached at the edge of the leaf. Another differentiating feature is the lack of curly tendrils that characterize Grape vines. The roots and berries contain alkaloids, including berberine, menispermine, dauricine. Ingesting the small purplish fruits will result in convulsions or seizures. In a survival context, you would be most likely to mistake Canada Moonseed berries for wild grapes. The seeds of this Eastern North American drupe (stone fruit) are extremely toxic to humans, although birds can eat them. Moonseeds first cause paralysis but are fatal in larger doses and/or if treatment is not sought immediately.

Daphne



This plant, also called the spurge laurel, is a favorite ornamental shrub in Europe. This drupe-producing evergreen with waxy, attractive foliage and gorgeously fragrant blooms is also highly toxic. Consumption of the leaves or red or yellow fruits will first cause nausea and violent vomiting, followed by internal bleeding, coma and death. The daphne plant is rich in the toxin mezerein.

Narcissus



Also called the daffodil, is highly poisonous. Poet's narcissus is more toxic than daffodil, but in both cases it is the bulbs, not the flower or stems, that cause illness.

Oleander



The oleander is the most deadly plant in the world. It is also tremendously popular as a decorative shrub. Just one leaf can kill an adult, and fatal poisonings have resulted from minimal exposure to the twigs, blooms and berries. The plant contains numerous toxins, including nerioside, oleandroside, saponins, and cardiac glycosides. Fatalities among horses and other livestock are common.

Rhododendron



The toxic rhododendron, a stalky tree-like evergreen shrub with large, brilliant blooms, is famously seen throughout much of the Pacific Northwest and is the state flower of Washington. Its relative, the popular garden shrub azalea, is also poisonous. Both plants contain andromedatoxin, which can cause severe pain, lethargy, depression, vomiting and nausea, progressive paralysis, coma and eventual death. All parts are deadly.

Chokecherry



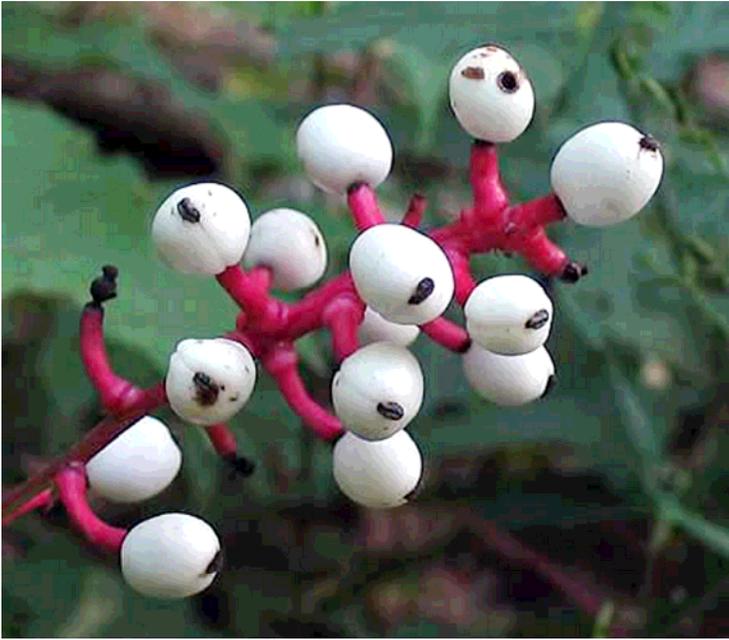
Chokecherry, or wild cherry, is a North American plant that is known for its large sprays of tiny white flowers. The cherries are small and not eaten. The plant's woody stalks and leaves are full of hydrocyanic acid, which is fatal if consumed. The poison affects the respiratory system, and rapid breathing, choking and asphyxiation result.

Nightshade



Also known as the devil's cherry, black cherry, great morel and belladonna, the nightshade is toxic from tip to top. Containing atropine, a deadly alkaloid, those who ingest even a small amount of the plant will soon notice they have lost their voice. Respiratory trouble and convulsions follow. The plant is problematic because its cherries are so sweet and children are frequently attracted to the wild fruit. Strangely, horses, birds, sheep, goats and pigs seem to be immune to the effects of nightshade. Nightshade poisoning is treatable with an emetic if treatment is sought swiftly.

Baneberry (White and Red Varieties)



The berries from these two plants are very poisonous. As few as 5 or 6 of them can make you seriously ill. More can cause death. However, it is unlikely that you will eat very many if you are cautious, as they don't taste very good, very acrid-tasting. The leaves of Red and White Baneberry are virtually identical. Red Baneberry berries are on thin stalks and have a tiny dot at the end of each berry. White Baneberry berries are held on thick stalks, and have a large conspicuous dot at the end of each berry. This is unique. No other plant has berries like this. The berries are **poisonous**. Alternate common name: Doll's Eyes.

Poison Sumac



This small tree is very poisonous to touch, the effects of contact with Poison Sumac are the same as Poison Ivy. A shrub or small tree, 6-20 feet tall. Compound, with 7-13 pointed, smooth-edged leaflets. The leaflets often angle slightly upwards from the leaf stem. **Berries:** Similar to Poison Ivy: spreading or drooping clusters of small white hard berries. Habitat: Grows in wet areas (wet ground or in standing water), in marshes and partly-wooded swamps.