

FACTSHEET

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Poisonous or harmful plants

Lots of plants are poisonous or capable of causing highly allergic reactions. Some will also pierce you with their sharp spines.

Few actually do lasting harm but some should be treated with care and respect. Garden and household chemicals, fires, backyard swimming pools and even ladders are far more dangerous backyard hazards for children than plants.

Who is at risk?

Children, who are crawling or toddling around, particularly babies and young children under 4 years of age, are most at risk of eating non edible plant matter. To reduce the chance of babies and young children eating anything poisonous take the following precautions:

- Teach children not to eat anything straight from a plant or bush.
- Fence off or remove known poisonous or dangerous plants (see list).
- Keep the **Poison Information Centre** phone number **13 11 26** near your phone or in the contact list of your mobile phone.

Symptoms to recognise

Symptoms of poisoning from plants can include:

- vomiting
- stomach cramps
- irregular heart beat
- burning or stinging to the mouth, lips or tongue
- convulsions (fits)

First aid

If you suspect a child has been exposed to something poisonous or harmful, first aid measures include:

- **For skin contact** - gently wash the skin with running water.
- **For eye contact** - flood the eye with clear running water for 10-15 minutes.
- **For swallowed plants** - remove any remaining plant pieces and wash out child's mouth.
- **Phone the Poison Information Centre on 13 11 26 for further information.**

If you need to go to hospital, take a piece or photo of the plant with you if you can.

If your child is having difficulty breathing, is unconscious or fitting, call an ambulance on 000.

Is it possible to recognise a poisonous or harmful plant?

There are no common characteristics of form, colouring, odour or taste, which mark a poisonous or harmful plant from a non-poisonous plant. As a general rule of thumb, plants with a bitter taste, funny smell, milky sap or red seeds or berries may be poisonous.

To avoid poisoning, we need to learn to recognise and avoid poisonous plants so that we can teach our children to also avoid poisonous plants.

Poisonous plants to avoid

1. Yellow oleander (*Thevetia peruviana*)

All parts of this plant are toxic. Seeds are very poisonous but also highly appealing, especially to kids, often called lucky nuts. Plants are evergreen with yellow tubular (funnel-shaped) flowers. These plants are mainly found in warm climates or in coastal gardens. Yellow oleander is different to pink oleander (*Nerium oleander*) which is commonly found in Sydney, Australia. Pink oleander is also considered poisonous.



2. Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*)

All parts of the plant are toxic and can affect the heart. These plants have long stalks with bell shaped flowers on them. The flowers range from pink to purple and are sometimes white in colour. The flowers have spots on the inside of the flower.



3. Castor Bean plant (*Ricinus communis*) and Crab's eye (*Abrus precatorius*)

Seeds, flowers and leaves are very toxic and deaths have occurred following ingestion of the seeds.



4. Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa Belladonna*)

All parts of the plant are toxic especially the fruit and seeds. It is a medium weed/shrub with dull dark green pointed leaves and dark purple bell shaped flowers. The purplish-black berry is sweet and tempting but very toxic to children. Black nightshade looks similar except with white flowers but has a lower risk of poisoning.



5. Euphorbia species

The sap from these common plants can cause severe pain and injury to the eye. They are also known as spurge and milkweed.



6. White Cedar (Melia azedarach)

White cedar is a large deciduous tree. All parts of the tree are toxic but the small yellow fruit are more commonly eaten by children.

7. Angels trumpet (Brugmansia and related Datura)

Woody shrubs with hanging trumpet shaped flowers. All parts of the plant are dangerous and especially toxic to children.



8. Oxalate-containing species

Many common indoor and outdoor plants, often belonging to the Araceae family contain oxalate crystals which cause intense pain when put in the mouth, swelling is also possible. Examples include Dieffenbachia, Dumb cane, Arum lily, Calla lily, Peace Lily, Philodendron, Elephant's Ear and Chinese lucky plant.



9. Stinging trees (eg Dendrocnide excelsa and Dendrocnide moroides)

Contact with the leaves will cause severe stinging which can last for days to months.



10. Mushrooms

Mushrooms are a fungi, but are included in this list as they cause the most hospitalisations. Many species are poisonous and some deadly. Remove wild mushrooms promptly if they are growing in your garden.



Dangerous plants to avoid if you have children

1. Yucca

Reports of serious perforation injuries to the ear canal from spiky leaves which can readily pierce skin too.

2. Cactus and succulents

Stylish but highly dangerous, especially to eyes. If you want to grow succulents, choose plants without spines such as Agave attenuate

3. Palm Spikes

Can cause serious injury especially to the joints and tendons in the hands

Allergic plants to avoid contact with

1. Asthma Weed

2. Rhus tree

3. Grevillias

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