

Garden plants poisonous to people

Annie Johnson

Weeds Project Officer

Stephen Johnson

Weed Ecologist

Weeds Unit, Biosecurity Compliance and Mine Safety, Orange

Introduction

There are a range of garden plants that are considered poisonous. Poisonings and deaths from garden plants are rare as most poisonous plants taste unpleasant and are seldom swallowed (see toxicity). However, it is best to know which plants are potentially toxic.

It is important to remember that small children are often at risk from coloured berries, petals and leaves that look succulent. This does not mean that all these poisonous plants should be avoided or removed from the garden. It is best to teach children never to eat seeds, berries or other plant parts without first asking an adult.

The plants in Tables 2–7 are often found in home gardens or grow wild in bushland surrounding homes. This is not a complete list of all poisonous plants grown in New South Wales.

Toxicity

The potential danger varies depending on dose. Some plants are capable of causing serious illness or death with only a small amount of exposure whilst others require large quantities to be consumed before even mild symptoms occur.

The plants listed in Tables 2–7 are given a rating of one to three stars depending on their toxicity (Table 1).

Table 1. Toxicity rating for Tables 2–7.

| Rating | Toxicity |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| * | Mildly toxic. Mild symptoms may occur if large quantities are eaten. |
| ** | Toxic. Causes discomfort and irritation but not dangerous to life. |
| *** | Highly toxic. Capable of causing serious illness or death. |

Poisoning

Poisoning from plants may occur from ingesting, inhalation or direct contact.

Symptoms from ingestion include gastroenteritis, diarrhoea, vomiting, nervous symptoms and in serious cases, respiratory and cardiac distress. Poisoning by inhalation of pollen, dust or fumes from burning plants can cause symptoms similar to hay fever or asthma. Contact poisoning on the skin or in the eyes can occur from direct contact with plant sap, the hairs or burrs; this can result in swelling, rashes or blistering.

What to do if poisoning occurs

- If the patient is unconscious, unresponsive or having difficulty breathing **call 000** or get to the emergency section of a hospital immediately.
- If the patient is conscious and responsive call the **Poisons Information Centre** on **13 11 26** or your doctor.

If going to a hospital, take a piece of the plant for identification.



Correct identification

Many garden plants can be easily confused with other similar species. However they can often have very different poisonous properties.

A good example is the rhus tree which is very similar to the Chinese pistachio. The rhus tree causes contact dermatitis and the smoke from burning rhus wood is toxic. However the similar looking pistachio is safe.

Like most look-a-like species, there are features that separate the rhus and pistachio trees. Most of the rhus tree's compound leaves end in a single leaflet whereas most pistachio leaves end in a pair of leaflets. Rhus foliage droops and the leaflets fold along the midrib producing a boat-like shape. Pistachio leaves do not droop and are flatter.

There are many books on identification of garden plants available.

Further assistance with identification of plants is available from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

Further Information

Further information on poisonous plants is also available from the following:

Poisonous Plants of Australia by S.L. Everist.

Pretty but poisonous by R.C.H. Shepherd, available from www.weedinfo.com.au

Plants and fungi poisonous to people in Queensland, www.health.qld.gov.au/PoisonsInformationCentre

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Ros Shepherd, author of *Pretty but poisonous*.

References

Shepherd, R.C.H. (2004) *Pretty but poisonous*. R.G. and F.J. Richardson Publishers, Melbourne.

Trounce, B. (2000) *Poisonous plants in the garden. Agfact 7.1.1*. NSW Agriculture, Orange.



Castor oil seeds can be attractive to young children. Two or three seeds can be fatal.
Photo: B. Trounce.

Table 2. Poisonous trees.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| * Apricot (also bitter almond, cherry, nectarine, plum and peach) <i>Prunus</i> species | Small deciduous tree with oval leaves, pink flowers and small fleshy fruit. | Raw seed (kernels), in large quantities. | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, respiratory and cardiac distress. |
| *** Bat's wing coral tree <i>Erythrina vespertilio</i> | Deciduous thorny tree with corky bark. Leaves three-lobed resembling a bat in flight. Scarlet to orange pea-shaped flowers are formed in loose clusters. | Leaves, bark and seeds. | Nausea, coma, respiratory distress. |
| * Bird of paradise plant <i>Caesalpinia gilliesii</i> | Shrub with fern-like foliage, yellow pea-shaped flowers with long red stamens, and pods 8–10 cm long. | Pods and seeds. | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea. |
| ** Black bean (Moreton Bay chestnut) <i>Castanospermum australe</i> | Large, spreading, evergreen native tree with glossy pinnate leaves. Yellow to orange-red, pea-shaped flowers and large, boat-shaped woody pods. | Seeds. | Vomiting, diarrhoea and dizziness. |
| * Camphor laurel <i>Cinnamomum camphora</i> | Evergreen tree. Leaves with glossy upper surface, pink-red when young. Purplish-black mature fruit. | All parts, also causes allergic reactions. | Nausea, vomiting, respiratory distress. Allergenic skin reactions. |
| * European beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> | Large deciduous tree with smooth grey bark. Leaves oval with pointed tip and small teeth on the margins. The flowers are red-brown, petalless, in drooping clusters. | Nuts are poisonous in large quantities. | Nausea, diarrhoea, headache and delirium. |
| ** False acacia (black locust) <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> | Deciduous tree with compound leaves and flowers. Sharp spines on stems. | All parts, especially pods, seeds, bark and leaves. | Dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, convulsions and drowsiness. |
| * Frangipani <i>Plumeria rubra</i> | Deciduous tree with milky sap. Oval, leathery leaves. The flowers are generally white or pink with yellow centres, have five petals and are found in open clusters. | The milky sap is a skin irritant and can cause allergic reactions. | Irritation of the skin, pink rash and dermatitis. |
| ** Golden chain tree <i>Laburnum anagyroides</i> | Deciduous tree with large, oval leaves and chain-like, yellow pea-shaped flowers. | All parts, especially seeds. | Burning mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, then convulsions and respiratory distress. |
| *** Golden dewdrop (sky flower, pigeon berry) <i>Duranta erecta</i> | Evergreen tree, leaves wide with pointed tip. Flowers small, lilac to blue, trumpet-shaped. Berries are yellow-orange in long strings. | Leaves and berries. | Sleepiness, high temperature, rapid pulse, vomiting, convulsions. |
| ** Holly <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> | Evergreen tree with silver bark. Leaves with glossy green upper surface, variable in shape with wavy margins and prickles. White or pink flowers with four petals. Berry bright red when mature. | Berries and leaves. | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, weakness and collapse. |
| * Oak <i>Quercus</i> species | Large and spreading deciduous tree. Toothed and lobed star-shaped leaves. Acorn nut. | Leaves, buds and acorns. Also causes allergic reactions. | Hay fever, mouth irritation, kidney and liver damage. |
| * Privet <i>Ligustrum</i> species | Naturalised and cultivated evergreen shrubs or small trees. Dark green leaves, opposite on stem, small, white, heavily perfumed flowers and black 'berries'. | Leaves and berries in large amounts. Also a mild skin irritant and pollen sometimes causes allergic reactions. | Nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, fever then convulsions. Perfume causes respiratory allergies. |

Table 2. Poisonous trees, continued.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ** Rhus (also varnish or lacquer tree) <i>Toxicodendron succedaneum</i> , <i>T. vernicifluum</i> | Small, deciduous tree. Compound leaves, brilliantly coloured in autumn. Clusters of papery seeds. | Skin contact with all parts, especially sap. Smoke from burning causes allergic reactions. | Dermatitis (skin irritation and rashes) varying in severity, possible blistering and swelling, chronic systemic illness. |
| * Silky oak <i>Grevillea robusta</i> | Semi-deciduous tree with rough bark. Brilliant yellow-orange flowers arranged in one-sided dense clusters. | Flowers, fruit, sap and sawdust cause allergic reactions. | Severe body rash and allergic dermatitis. |
| * Tree-of-heaven <i>Ailanthus altissima</i> | Deciduous tree with greyish bark, with a tendency to sucker extensively from its roots to form thickets. Dark green leaves turn yellow in autumn. Small white or yellow-green flowers in clusters. | The sap is a skin and eye irritant. Pollen can cause allergic reactions. | Headache, nausea, hay fever, skin rashes, dermatitis and conjunctivitis. |
| *** White cedar <i>Melia azedarach</i> | Deciduous tree with grey-brown bark that grows to 30 m. Bright green leaves and purple, perfumed flowers. Berry-like fruit is small and yellow. | All parts, especially fruit (6–8 are sufficient to kill a small child). | Nausea, spasms, drowsiness then convulsions, death. |



Privet is an irritant and the pollen is allergenic. Photo: S. Johnson



Cotoneaster berries are poisonous. Photo: B. Trounce.



A rhus tree in autumn foliage. The rhus tree causes dermatitis and the smoke from burning wood is also toxic. Photo: B. Trounce.

Table 3. Poisonous shrubs.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ** African boxthorn <i>Lycium ferocissimum</i> | Woody, evergreen shrub with spines. Pale green, oval, thick, soft leaves. The flowers are pale violet, with long stamens and the fruit a bright orange-red berry. | Berries, leaves, stem and roots. | Nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulties and unconsciousness. |
| *** Angel's trumpet <i>Datura species</i> <i>Brugmansia species</i> | Large-leafed shrub with large, trumpet-shaped, white, pendulous flowers. Fruit is a spiny capsule. Several species. Evergreen shrub or small tree. Leaves long and oval with wavy margins. Flowers generally white, pink to red and long, tubular or trumpet-shaped. | All parts, especially flowers, seeds and nectar. | Dilated pupils, delirium and excitability, gastroenteritis, fever and increased blood pressure, confusion, delirium, and convulsions. |
| ** Broom (Scotch or English broom) <i>Cytisus scoparius</i> | Shrub growing to 3 m high. Dark green, hairy leaves with three lance-shaped leaflets. Golden yellow pea-shaped flowers. | Seeds and leaves. | High blood pressure, nausea. Large doses weaken the heart. |
| *** Bushman's poison (Wintersweet) <i>Acokanthera oblongifolia</i> | Stipitate, dark green leaves. Clusters of tubular flowers that are white and tinged pink. Purple berries, like olives. | All parts. Can also be a skin and eye irritant. | Severe gastroenteritis, nervous symptoms and cardiac distress. |
| *** Castor oil plant <i>Ricinus communis</i> | Evergreen tall shrub with large, vee-lobed green leaves turning to red. Fruit pea-sized and shiny with soft spines. | Flowers, leaves and seeds. Eating only 2–8 seeds can cause death. | Burning sensation in mouth and throat, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhoea, fever, convulsions then respiratory and cardiac distress, death. |
| * Cotoneaster <i>Cotoneaster species</i> | Evergreen shrub or small tree with dark green oval leaves. The flowers are white to pink and it has red-orange berries. | Berries (large numbers only). | Gastroenteritis. |
| *** Daphne <i>Daphne species</i> | Small shrub with dark green lance-shaped leaves. The flowers are pink and white. The berry is yellow or red. | All parts, especially berries and bark. The sap is also an irritant. | Burning sensation in mouth and stomach, vomiting, diarrhoea then collapse. |
| ** Hydrangea <i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i> | Deciduous shrub. Shiny oval leaves with pointed tip and toothed margins. Pink, blue or white flowers in large clusters. | All parts when ingested. Also a minor skin irritant. | Nausea and gastroenteritis. Rash or irritation on skin. |
| * Jerusalem cherry (Madeira winter cherry) <i>Solanum pseudocapsicum</i> | Small shrub, with tapered leaves; small, white star-shaped flowers and orange berries. | Leaves and possibly green fruit. | Muscular weakness. |
| *** Lantana <i>Lantana species</i> | Shrub with prickly stems and oval-shaped leaves with a pointed tip. Clusters of colourful flowers (varying colours). Purplish-black berries. | All parts, especially green berries. Also a skin and possibly an eye irritant. | Vomiting, diarrhoea, muscular weakness and respiratory distress. Irritant dermatitis on skin. |



Lantana is an irritant and the berries are poisonous. Photo: S. Johnson

Table 3. Poisonous shrubs, continued.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *** Oleander <i>Nerium oleander</i> | Shrub with long, pointed, leathery-textured leaves, and pink, red or white ve petaled owers. | All parts and smoke from burning wood. Poisoning rare as plant tastes foul. Also a skin irritant. | Vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, convulsions, irregular pulse then respiratory distress. Irritant dermatitis on skin. |
| ** Pencil plant <i>Euphorbia tirucalli</i> | Sti shrub with pencil-like branches and no apparent leaves. Milky sap present. | Milky sap. | Sap in eyes causes severe irritation and temporary blindness. Blistering in mouth and other soft skin areas. |
| ** Poinsettia <i>Euphorbia pulcherrima</i> | Tall shrub with large red or yellow winter ower bracts. | Leaves, sap and seeds. | Delirium and gastroenteritis. Sap causes injury to eyes and mouth. |
| ** Spanish broom <i>Spartium junceum</i> | Deciduous shrub, with almost lea ess green twiggly branches. Yellow pea-shaped owers. | Seeds when ingested. | Nausea, diarrhoea, convulsions and respiratory distress. |
| *** Yellow oleander (da odil tree) <i>Cascabela thevetia</i> | Evergreen shrub to 6 m high. Glossy green narrow leaves, 15 cm long with milky sap. The owers are yellow, 5 cm long and funnel-shaped. | All parts. | Burning mouth, nausea, diarrhoea, respiratory and cardiac distress. |



All parts of the oleander are poisonous, as well as smoke from the burning wood. Photo: J.J. Dellow.



Poinsettia leaves and sap are poisonous and the sap is an irritant. Photo: B. Trounce.



Ingestion of portions of daffodil and many other common garden bulbs causes vomiting. Photo: A. Johnson.

Table 4. Poisonous herbs and bulbs.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ** Agapanthus (African lily) <i>Agapanthus praecox</i> subsp. <i>orientalis</i> | Perennial herb with glossy green 30–70 cm long leaves. Flowers blue or white on smooth thick woody stems growing to 1.5 m tall. | Leaves, roots and sap are poisonous when ingested. Can also be a skin irritant. | Severe ulceration of the mouth. Burning sensation and rashes on skin. |
| * Amaryllis <i>Hippeastrum</i> species | Perennial herb; mid-green leaves strap-like rising from the bulb. Flowers on thick hollow stems, lily-like in a number of colours. | Bulb when ingested (rare). Sap can be a skin irritant. | Nausea and vomiting when ingested. Allergic and irritant dermatitis on skin. |
| *** Arum lily (calla lily) <i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i> | Dark green, fleshy leaves and stems. The flower is large, white and funnel-shaped surrounding a yellow spike. | All parts, especially the flower. | Swelling mouth, acute gastritis and diarrhoea which can lead to exhaustion and shock. Eczema and dermatitis on skin. |
| *** Autumn crocus <i>Colchicum autumnale</i> | Perennial herb with bright green oblong leaves to 35 cm long. Pale rose-purple, lilac or white, crocus-like flowers. Leaves absent when flowering. | All parts when ingested. | Burning mouth and throat, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and nervous symptoms. Symptoms may not appear for 48 hrs. |
| ** Bulbs (for example daffodils, jonquils, belladonna lilies, glory lilies, hyacinths, bluebells, and tulips). <i>Narcissus pseudonarcissus</i> , <i>N. jonquilla</i> , <i>Amaryllis belladonna</i> , <i>Gloriosa superba</i> , <i>Muscari armeniacum</i> , <i>Hyacinthoides</i> species, <i>Tulipa</i> species. | Dormant bulbs produce fleshy, strap-like leaves in winter and flowers in spring. | Some plants all parts, others the bulb and sap only. Sap can also be a skin irritant. | Nausea and vomiting to severe gastroenteritis. As taste is so unpleasant, it is unlikely that much will be eaten. Irritation and rashes on skin, sometimes dermatitis. |
| *** Cape tulips One-leaf cape tulip <i>Moraea accida</i> Two-leaf cape tulip <i>Moraea miniata</i> (synonym <i>Homeria</i> species). | One or two leaf blades up to 1 m long, only 2 cm wide. Salmon pink, orange or yellow flowers with six petals. | All parts when ingested. | Acute vomiting and diarrhoea. Could lead to paralysis. |
| *** Cunjevoi (elephant's ears) <i>Alocasia macrorrhizos</i> , <i>A. brisbanensis</i> . | Thick stems, very large fleshy leaves to 3 m long and 2 m wide. Flowers similar to arum lily. | All parts. Also a skin and eye irritant. | Painful irritation, burning and swelling of tongue and throat. Severe gastric irritation and vomiting. Irritant dermatitis on skin and conjunctivitis. |
| ** Cyclamen <i>Cyclamen persicum</i> | Perennial herb with dull green leaves often with paler markings, oval- to heart-shaped. Flowers white, mauve, red or pink. | The corm (underground part). | Nausea and vomiting. |
| *** Delphinium <i>Delphinium x cultorum</i> | Tall perennial with mid green palm-shaped leaves. Flowers in variety of colours on a showy spike. | All parts, especially seeds. Leaves can be irritants. | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, weakness, convulsions and paralysis. |
| ** Elephant's ears (taro) <i>Colocasia esculenta</i> | Large, dark green leaves and fleshy stems. Flower a yellow spike surrounded by hood. Small berry. | All parts. Also a skin and eye irritant. | Local irritation and swelling, gastric and respiratory symptoms. Irritant dermatitis on skin. |

Table 4. Poisonous herbs and bulbs, continued.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ** Flax lily <i>Dianella species</i> | Perennial herb, 50–150 cm high. Long stem narrow leaves. Pale blue to violet flowers 1–2 cm and star-like with six petals growing in clusters. Berries are blue when mature. | Berries. | Respiratory distress and staggering. |
| *** Foxglove <i>Digitalis purpurea</i> | Velvety leaves in rosette formation at base of long stem. Flowers mauve, white or purple bells to 5 cm. | All parts. | Nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulties, disturbed pulse, drowsiness then convulsions. |
| *** Glory/Gloriosa lily (climbing lily) <i>Gloriosa superba</i> , <i>G. rothschildiana</i> | Climbing lily, leaves pointed and curled at tips, large red-orange spider-like flowers. | All parts, particularly roots. Tubers also a contact irritant. | Tingling, numbness of lips, tongue, throat and skin, nausea, vomiting, giddiness, respiratory distress and irregular heartbeat. |
| *** Hellebores (Christmas rose, winter rose) <i>Helleborus species</i> | Mid- to dark-green leaves, with toothed margins. The flowers are cup-shaped, white to pale green to pink. | All parts. Also a skin irritant. | Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, weakness, convulsions and paralysis. |
| *** Hemlock <i>Conium maculatum</i> | Herb with a taproot that could be mistaken for parsnip or carrot. Stem is green with purple blotches to 2 m high. White flowers in an umbrella-shaped cluster. | All parts when ingested. | Nervous symptoms, trembling then respiratory distress. |
| *** Lily-of-the-valley <i>Convallaria majalis</i> | Small, cool-climate plant with paired leaves to 20 cm and small, perfumed, bell-shaped flowers. | All parts, especially berries. Leaves can be a mild irritant. | Irritation of the mouth, nausea, dizziness, vomiting, diarrhoea, slow heart rate and breathing, heart failure. |
| ** Lupins <i>Lupinus species</i> | Fan-shaped leaflets on long stalks. Flowers grow in showy upright clusters 20–40 cm tall. | Dried and fresh leaves and young stems. | Vomiting, dizziness, headache, in extreme cases respiratory and cardiac distress. |
| *** Naked ladies <i>Amaryllis belladonna</i> | Bulbous plant with pink, lily-type flowers on long stems appearing before the dark green, strap-shaped leaves. | All parts suspected. Sap and bulb also a skin irritant. | Vomiting, diarrhoea and severe gastroenteritis. Irritant dermatitis and allergic reactions on skin. |
| * Peruvian lily (alstroemeria) <i>Alstroemeria aurea</i> | Tuberous, clumped perennial herb. Flowers can be many colours; they are funnel-shaped with six petals, the inner three petals often have dark streaks. | All parts, especially the flowers, leaves and stems which can cause skin allergies. | Dermatitis and rashes. |



All parts of foxglove are toxic. Photo: B. Trounce.



Glory lily is an irritant as well as poisonous. Photo: B. Trounce.

Table 5. Poisonous climbers.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| * Carolina jessamine <i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i> | Evergreen climbing vine with dark green leaves to 5 cm and yellow funnel-shaped flowers. | All parts, especially roots, nectar and flowers. | Nausea, dilation of pupils, muscular weakness, convulsions and respiratory distress. |
| ** Heart-leaf philodendron <i>Philodendron scandens</i> | Evergreen climber. Heart-shaped dark green leaves to 40 cm long. Flowers are a white spike sometimes red at the base. | All parts. Also a skin and eye irritant. | Irritation of mouth, nausea, vomiting and respiratory distress. |
| ** Japanese honeysuckle <i>Lonicera japonica</i> | Evergreen climber growing 10–15 m high. Young stems red and older stems woody. Dark green leaves, oblong with pointed tip. White-pink then yellow tubular flowers with long stamens. Shiny black berries. | Berries and leaves poisonous. Also a skin irritant. | Gastro-intestinal irritation. Rashes on skin. |
| ** Morning glory <i>Ipomoea indica</i> | Vigorous perennial creeper to 15 m. Mid green leaves, broadly oval, covered in fine hairs. Blue or purple, funnel-shaped flowers. Flowers only last one day. | Seeds. | Visual distortion, restlessness and nausea. |
| * Poison ivy <i>Toxicodendron radicans</i> | Climbing vine 3–4 m long. Green leaves turn rich red in autumn. Green-yellow flowers. | All parts when ingested and also a skin irritant. | Severe gastric problems. Severe skin irritation, reddening and blistering. |
| ** Sweet pea <i>Lathyrus odoratus</i> | Scrambling annual herb with lance-shaped leaves to 6 cm long. Clustered, pea-shaped flowers in many colours. | All parts, especially the seeds. | Slow pulse, respiratory distress then convulsions. |
| * Wisteria <i>Wisteria sinensis</i> and <i>W. oribunda</i> | Deciduous woody climber with mauve or white pendulous flowers in spring. | All parts, especially seeds and pods. | Vomiting, diarrhoea, mild to severe gastroenteritis. |
| * Yellow allamanda (trumpet vine) <i>Allamanda cathartica</i> | Evergreen climber. Glossy green leaves to 10 cm long. Golden yellow trumpet-shaped flowers. | All parts when ingested. The milky sap is a skin irritant. | Mild to severe stomach upset when ingested. On skin, irritation and dermatitis. |



Seed pods of the wisteria can cause gastric pain and vomiting if ingested. Photo: B. Trounce.

Table 6. Miscellaneous poisonous plants.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ** Burrawang <i>Macrozamia</i> species | Native and cultivated palm-like plant producing large cones with red or yellow seeds. | Seeds. | Nausea, vomiting and muscular weakness. |
| * Dumb cane <i>Dieffenbachia</i> species | Evergreen herb often grown as an indoor plant. Leaves are dark green splashed with cream. | Sap from leaves and stem. Also a skin and eye irritant. | Irritation and burning of mouth, difficulty breathing. Severe irritation and dermatitis on skin. |
| *** Dwarf sago palm <i>Cycas revoluta</i> | Cycad, to 3 m high and 2 m wide. Dark shiny-green leaves and a central cone. | Fruit, seeds and young leaves when ingested. | Nausea and vomiting. |
| *** Some mushrooms and toadstools | Fungi, usually growing in grassland or under trees. Consists of stalk and cap. | All parts. | Drowsiness, dizziness, hilarity, vomiting, irregular pulse and hallucinations. |
| ** Rhubarb <i>Rheum x cultorum</i> | Perennial herb to 1 m high. Large dull green leaves and reddish stems. | Leaf-blades (leaf-stalk edible when cooked). Also a minor skin irritant. | Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. |



All parts of the rhubarb except the cooked stems are poisonous. Photo: A. Johnson



All parts of the arum lily are poisonous, especially the flower. Photo: J.J. Dellow

Table 7. Poisonous weeds.

| Common name <i>Botanical name</i> | Description of plant | Poisonous parts | Symptoms (progressive depending on dose) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *** Apple of Sodom (devil's apple) <i>Solanum sodomaeum</i> | Branching low shrub, covered with prickles, leaves lobed, purple flowers and yellow fruit. | Fruit. | Gastroenteritis, dizziness, confusion and hallucinations. |
| * Blackberry nightshade <i>Solanum nigrum</i> | Branching low shrub, covered with prickles, leaves lobed, small white flowers and black berries. | Leaves and green berries. | Mild gastroenteritis. |
| * Cotton bush (swan plant), Ballon cotton bush. <i>Gomphocarpus fruticosus</i> , <i>G. physocarpus</i> | Evergreen shrub with narrow leaves and white tubular flowers. Fruits balloon-like, covered with soft, green spines. Seed has tuft of light green hairs. | All parts. Seedlings more toxic than mature plants. Sap is also a skin irritant. | Stomach upset and skin rashes. |
| *** Deadly nightshade <i>Atropa belladonna</i> | Upright plant with large oval leaves, purple flowers and black berries. | All parts. | Nausea, dilated pupils, uncoordinated movements, heart and respiratory symptoms. |
| *** Green cestrum <i>Cestrum parqui</i> | Evergreen shrub to 2 m high with pale yellow, tubular flowers. Berries black when ripe. | All parts, especially green berries. | Liver damage. |
| * Pellitory or asthma weed <i>Parietaria judaica</i> | A perennial with fine hairs on stems and leaves. Reddish stems with glossy green lance-shaped leaves and small, greenish flowers. | Plant hairs cling to clothes and cause irritation. The pollen causes allergic reactions. | Asthma, conjunctivitis, hay fever and severe skin irritation. |
| ** Petty spurge <i>Euphorbia peplus</i> | Soft, green, oval leaves, inconspicuous greenish-yellow flowers, milky sap. | Sap. | Blistering and irritation of mouth and stomach mucosa, vomiting and purging. |
| ** Snow-on-the mountains (ghost weed) <i>Euphorbia marginata</i> | Upright branching weed to 30 cm with green-white leaves, white flowers and green fruits. | Sap. | Burning and irritation of mouth and stomach mucosa, vomiting and purging. |
| * Stinging nettle (also giant nettle, scrub nettle and dwarf nettle) <i>Urtica</i> species | Perennial herb, oval to lance-shaped leaves with toothed margins. Leaves are covered with hairs. Tiny pale green flowers in clusters. | Hairs are skin irritant, allergenic. Pollen causes hayfever. | Irritation of the skin and burning sensation. |
| *** Thornapple <i>Datura</i> species | Annual herb with stout stems. Large white bell- flowers, spiky fruit and black seeds. | All parts, especially flowers, seeds and nectar. | Thirst, increased temperature, rapid pulse, incoherence and convulsions. |
| * Tobacco <i>Nicotiana tabacum</i> | Naturalised shrub with yellow flowers. | All parts, especially the leaves. | Foul taste restricts intake so symptoms usually mild. Salivation, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea. Long term smoking of the leaves causes cancer. |



Pellitory or asthma weed. Pollen affects a large percentage of the population. Photo: B. Trounce.



Green cestrum berries can cause liver damage. Photo: B. Trounce.

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