

# AGFACTS AGFACTS AGFACTS



NSW Agriculture

## Poisonous Plants In The Garden

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All parts of the oleander are poisonous, as well as smoke from the burning wood.

There are a range of garden plants that are considered poisonous. Their potential danger varies; some causing nausea and vomiting while others are highly toxic and can kill. Small children are at particular risk, especially from coloured berries and petals and leaves that look succulent. However, as most poisonous plant parts taste unpleasant, they are



All parts of the arum lily are poisonous, especially the flower.

seldom swallowed.

Therefore few children are poisoned and deaths are rare.

It is a wise precaution though to teach children never to eat seeds, berries or other plant parts without first asking an adult.

### TREATMENT

If poisoning occurs or is suspected, get medical attention promptly or call the Poison's Information Centre on 13 1126. If going to a hospital, take a piece of the plant for identification.



Seed pods of the wisteria can cause gastric pain and vomiting if eaten.

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The following list includes popular garden plants capable of causing problems. Some commonly occurring weeds and other plants are also included.

## TOXICITY GUIDE

\* Mildly toxic — mild symptoms may occur if a large quantity is eaten.

\*\* Toxic — causes discomfort and irritation but not dangerous to life.

\*\*\* Highly toxic — capable of causing serious illness or death.

<b>Table 1. Poisonous Trees</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
*bird of paradise plant	<i>Caesalpinia gilliesii</i>	Shrub with fern-like foliage, yellow pea flowers with red stamens, and pods 8–10 cm long.	Pods, seeds	Gastroenteritis
***bitter almond (also apricot, cherry and peach)	<i>Prunus amygdalus</i>	Small deciduous tree with oval leaves, pink blossom and small fleshy fruit.	Seed (kernels), if more than 10 eaten.	Vomiting, purging, collapse.
**black bean (Moreton Bay chestnut)	<i>Catanospermum australe</i>	Large, spreading, evergreen native tree with glossy pinnate leaves. Orange flowers in summer are followed by large, boat-shaped woody pods.	Seeds	Purging and vomiting, sometimes dizziness.
**false acacia (black locust)	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	Deciduous tree with compound leaves and flowers. Sharp spines on stems.	Pods, seeds, bark, leaves.	Gastroenteritis
**golden chain tree	<i>Laburnum anagyroides</i>	Deciduous tree with large, oval leaves and chain-like racemes of yellow pea-flowers.	All parts, especially seeds.	Nervous symptoms, vomiting, spasms, convulsions.

<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
*privet (large-leafed and small-leafed)	<i>Ligustrum</i> species	Naturalised and cultivated evergreen shrubs–small trees. Dark green leaves, opposite on stem; small, white, heavily-perfumed flowers and black “berries”.	Fruit — large numbers only.	Gastric irritation (purging, vomiting and pain). Perfume causes respiratory allergies.
**rhus	<i>Toxicodendron succedaneum</i>	Small, deciduous tree. Compound leaves, brilliantly coloured in autumn. Clusters of papery seeds.	Skin contact with all parts, especially sap. Smoke also allergenic when wood is burned.	Dermatitis (skin irritation and rashes) varying in severity. Possible blistering and swelling. Chronic systemic illness.
***white cedar	<i>Melia azedarach</i>	Native and cultivated deciduous tree. Purplish, perfumed flowers. Fruit small and yellow.	Fruit (6–8 sufficient to kill small child).	Nausea, spasms, insensibility.

<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
***angel's trumpet	<i>Datura</i> species	Large-leafed shrubs with large, trumpet-shaped, white, pendulous flowers. Fruit is a spiny capsule.	Seeds, flowers.	Dilated pupils, delirium, excitability.
***bushman's poison (wintersweet)	<i>Acokanthera oblongifolia</i>	Stiff, dark green leaves. Clusters of tubular flowers, white, tinged pink. Purple berries, like small plums.	All parts.	Purging, dizziness, heart disturbance.
Naturalised and cultivated tall shrub with large, five-lobed green leaves turning to red. Fruit pea-sized and shiny with soft spines.	<i>Ricinus communis</i>		Seeds. Eating only 2–3 can cause death.	Burning sensation in mouth and throat, abdominal pain and purging.

<b>Table 2. Poisonous Shrubs</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
*cotoneaster	<i>Cotoneaster</i> species	Cultivated shrub with oval leaves and red or orange berries.	Berries (large numbers only).	Mild gastroenteritis — vomiting and agitation.
***daphne	<i>Daphne odora</i>	Small shrub with fragrant pink and white flowers.	All parts, especially berries.	Burning sensation in mouth and stomach, vomiting and purging, collapse.
***golden dewdrop (skyflower, pigeon berry)	<i>Duranta repens</i>	Small shrub with fragrant pink and white flowers.	Fruit, bark.	Sleepiness, high temperature, rapid pulse, convulsions.
*Jerusalem cherry (Madeira winter cherry)	<i>Solanum pseudocapsicum</i>	Small shrub, with tapered leaves; small, white star-shaped flowers and orange berries. Can be a weed.	Leaves and possibly green fruit.	Muscular weakness.
***lantana	<i>Lantana</i> species	Naturalised and cultivated shrub with prickly stems and leaves. Clusters of colourful flowers (varying colours). Purplish-black berries.	Green fruit (toxicity varies from plant to plant).	Gastrointestinal irritation, jaundice, muscular weakness.
***oleander	<i>Nerium oleander</i>	Tall woody shrub with long, pointed, leathery-textured leaves, and pink, red or white flowers.	All parts and smoke from burning wood. Poisoning rare as plant tastes foul.	Vomiting, abdominal pain, dizziness, convulsions, irregular pulse, collapse.
**pencil plant	<i>Euphorbia tirucalli</i>	Stiff 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 flower bracts.	Leaves, sap, seeds.	Delirium, gastroenteritis. Sap injurious to eyes, mouth.

<b>Table 3. Herbaceous Perennials And Bulbs</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
***Arum lily (calla lily)	<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>	Dark green, fleshy leaves and stems. Flower-spike a large, white, funnel-shaped spathe surrounding a yellow spadix (central column).	All parts, flower particularly so.	Swelling of tongue and throat, Acute gastritis and severe purging which can lead to exhaustion and shock.
*bulbs (for example daffodils, jonquils, belladonna lilies, gloriosa lilies, hyacinths, bluebells).	<i>Narcissus pseudonarcissus</i> , <i>N. jonquilla</i> , <i>Amaryllis belladonna</i> , <i>Gloriosa superba</i> , <i>Hyacinthus</i> spp. <i>Wahlenbergia</i> spp.	Dormant bulbs produce fleshy, strap-like leaves in winter and flowers in spring.	Sap, bulb.	Vomiting, purging. As taste is so unpleasant, it is unlikely that much will be eaten.
***cunjevoi (elephant's ears)	<i>Alocasia macrorrhiza</i>	Large, light green, fleshy leaves and stems. Similar to arum lily.	All parts.	Painful irritation, burning and swelling of tongue and throat. Severe gastric irritation.
**elephant's ears (taro)	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Large, dark green leaves and fleshy stems.	All parts.	Local irritation and swelling, gastric and respiratory symptoms.
***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.	Action on heart muscle, nausea, breathing difficulties, disturbed pulse, drowsiness, convulsions.
***gloriosa lily (glory lily, climbing lily)	<i>Gloriosa superba</i> , <i>G. rothschildiana</i>	Climbing lily, leaves pointed and curled at tips, large red/orange spidery-lily flowers.	All parts, particularly roots.	Tingling, numbness of lips, tongue, throat and skin; giddiness, respiratory distress, irregular heartbeat.
*hyacinth	<i>Hyacinthus</i> spp.	(see under bulbs)		

<b>Table 3. Herbaceous Perennials And Bulbs</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
**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.	Nausea dizziness, irregular heart action.
**naked ladies	<i>Amaryllis belladona</i>	Bulbous plant with pink, lily-type flowers on long stems appearing before the dark green, strap-shaped leaves.	All parts suspect.	Vomiting, purging

<b>Table 4. Poisonous climbing plants</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
*Carolina jasmine (Carolina jessamine)	<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>	Dark green leaves and yellow flowers.	Roots, nectar, flowers.	Nausea, dilation of pupils, muscular weakness.
*wisteria	<i>Wisteria sinensis.</i> <i>W. floribunda</i>	Deciduous climber with mauve or white pendulous flowers in spring.	Seeds, pods.	Gastric pain, vomiting, purging.

<b>Table 5. Poisonous Miscellaneous Plants</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
**burrawang	<i>Macrozamia species</i>	Native and cultivated palm-like plant producing large cones with red or yellow seeds.	Seeds.	Nausea, vomiting, muscular weakness.
**dumb cane	<i>Dieffenbachia species</i>	Indoor plants with large, variegated leaves.	All parts.	Irritation and burning of mucous membranes, copious salivation and swelling.
***some mushrooms and toadstools	Several species	Fungi, usually growing in grassland or under trees. Consists of stalk and cap.	All parts.	Drowsiness, dizziness, hilarity, vomiting, hallucinations.

<b>Table 5. Poisonous Miscellaneous Plants</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
**rhubarb	<i>Rheum rhabonticum</i>	Cultivated garden plant. Large leaves and reddish stems.	Leaf-blades (leaf-stalk edible when cooked).	Nausea, vomiting, purging.
<b>Table 6. Poisonous Weeds</b>				
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Botanical name</b>	<b>Description of Plant</b>	<b>Poisonous parts</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
***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, hallucinations.
*blackberry nightshade	<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Native weed. Small white flowers and black berries	Leaves, green berries.	Mild gastroenteritis
***cotton bush (swan plant)	<i>Gomphocarpus fruticosus</i>	White flowers. Fruits balloon-like, covered with soft, green spines. Seed has tuft of light green hairs.	All parts. Seedlings more toxic than mature plants.	Gastroenteritis
***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.



**Golden chain tree (*Laburnum anagyroides*).** All parts of the tree are poisonous, especially the seeds.



**Narrowleaf privet (*Ligustrum sinense*).** Perfume and pollen causes respiratory distress for susceptible people. Ingestion of a large number of berries can cause pain and vomiting.

Table 6. Poisonous Weeds				
Common name	Botanical name	Description of Plant	Poisonous parts	Symptoms
**green cestrum	<i>Cestrum parqui</i>	Shrubs with pale yellow, tubular flowers. Berries black when ripe. Often a weed.	Green berries	Hallucinations, elevated temperatures.
**pellitory	<i>Parietaria judaica</i>	Perennial with fine hairs on stems and leaves. Stems 30–60 cm branching from woody rootstock. Leaves ovate to lanceolate, 1–4 cm and prominently veined, flowers small and greenish in summer. A weed of rocky foreshores and sandstone soils.	Pollen. Leaves/stems.	Asthma, rhinitis, conjunctivitis. Contact allergy with skin.
**petty spurge	<i>Euphorbia peplus</i>	Soft, green, oval leaves, inconspicuous greenish–yellow flowers, milky sap.	Milky sap	Blistering and irritation of mouth and stomach mucosa, vomiting and purging.
*privet	<i>Ligustrum</i> species	See under <i>Trees</i>		
**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.	Milky sap.	Burning and irritation of mouth and stomach mucosa, vomiting and purging.
*stinging nettle	<i>Urtica</i> species	Leaves in pairs, covered with rigid stinging hairs.	Stinging hairs, not toxic, but an irritant.	Skin irritation, pain.
***thornapple	<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Naturalised and cultivated annual herb. Large white bell-flowers, spiky fruit, black seeds.	Seeds, leaves.	Intense thirst, increased temperature, abnormal behaviour, convulsions.
**tree tobacco	<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	Naturalised shrub, yellow flowers	Leaves, flowers.	Foul taste restricts intake so symptoms usually mild. Loss of balance, heart disturbance.

Members of the following two families, both commonly represented in the garden, share similar poisonous properties.

### **Euphorbiaceae family**

This plant family includes several garden trees and shrubs and a number of weeds, all of which have milky sap. This sap is very irritant to soft skin surfaces, particularly eyes and the mucosa of the mouth, throat and stomach. Temporary blindness, burning and blistering can occur. Gastroenteritis is often an additional symptom

Some frequently-occurring members of the family are:

- poinsettia (*E. pulcherrima*) — see *Shrubs*.
- pencil plant (*E. tirucali*) — see *Weeds*.
- petty spurge (*E. peplus*) — see *Weeds*.
- snow-on-the-mountains (*E. marginata*) — see *Weeds*.

### **Solanaceae family**

This large plant family includes the potato, tomato, capsicum, some ornamental plants and a number of weeds.

While some ripe fruits and potato tubers are edible, other plant parts, particularly leaves, green berries and green potato tubers, contain toxins. Symptoms of poisoning include gastroenteritis, muscular twitching, shivering and convulsions. Some plants of the Solanaceae family that may be encountered in the home garden are:

- belladonna, deadly nightshade (*Atropa*

*belladonna*) — see *Weeds*.

- green cestrum (*Cestrum parqui*) — see *Weeds*.
- angel's trumpet (*Datura* species) — see *Shrubs*.
- thornapple (*Datura stramonium*) — see *Weeds*.
- tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) — see *Weeds*.
- Blackberry nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*) — see *Weeds*.
- Jerusalem cherry, Madeira winter cherry (*Solanum pseudocapsicum*) — see *Shrubs*.
- apple of Sodom (*Solanum sodomaeum*) — see *Weeds*.

This is not a complete list of all plants grown in New South Wales and considered poisonous.

Those mentioned are plants most commonly found in home gardens or growing wild in natural bushland.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

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

Further information is also available from the reference book, *Poisonous Plants of Australia* by S.L. Everist.



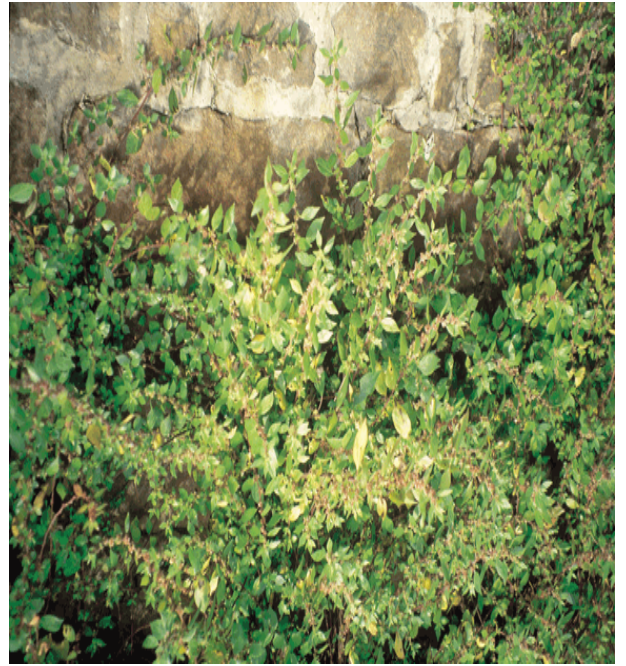
Ingestion of portions of daffodil and many other common garden bulbs cause vomiting.



Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*). Leaves, sap and seeds are poisonous. Sap can burn eyes and mouth.



**Green cestrum berries can cause hallucinations and elevated temperature.**



**Pelitery or asthma weed flowers over a long period. Pollen causes respiratory difficulties with a large percentage of the population.**



**Petty spurge — milky sap causes blistering and irritation of mouth and stomach. Vomiting is common.**



**Castor oil (*Ricinus communis*). Seeds can be attractive to young children — 2–3 seeds can cause death.**

**Table 7. Botanical Names Index**

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Botanical Name	Common Name	Page	Botanical Name	Common Name	Page
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A rhus tree in autumn foliage. Rhus and Chinese pistachio are often confused. 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.

#### DISCLAIMERS

**The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (2000). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date, and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Agriculture or the user's independent adviser.**

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