

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 66

Poisonous Outdoor Plants of Ontario

Even though most plants are thought to be decorative and harmless, a few are potentially dangerous, even flowers that we see in our gardens. This is a list of some common poisonous plants of southern Ontario and their effects on humans.

Poison Ivy

Poison ivy is one of the best-known poisonous plants in Ontario. It has three glossy, spoon-shaped leaves, with the middle one having a longer petiole than the others. The edges of the leaves can be entire or serrate, ending with an acuminate tip.

This potentially dangerous plant, growing as a shrub or a vine, can be found in cottage country, at the edges of golf courses, and on the shores of rivers, streams and lakes.

Urushiol is the allergenic agent found in most parts of the plant, and damage to its tissues causes the nonvolatile chemicals to be exposed. Humans are often sensitized, with symptoms ranging from mild itchiness and redness to severe oozing lesions with fever.

Poison Sumac

Although not as widespread, poison sumac can be just as dangerous as poison ivy. Found mostly in wooded swamps and bogs, the wild plant can have anywhere from 7 to 13 leaves, arranged in pairs, with the final leaflet on the tip. Poison sumac may also have off-white fruit and small flowers in the summer.

The allergen urushiol is released when the plant tissue is damaged and can cause mild to severe dermatitis in humans.

Chrysanthemum

Chrysanthemums and cultivated hybrids are perennial ornamentals grown indoors and outdoors. The active allergen in the plant, artemisinin, crosses with human proteins so that complete antigens are produced.

Some humans develop contact dermatitis after extended exposure to garden mums. This is an occupational hazard of florists, nursery workers, and gardeners.

Daffodil

Daffodils are ornamentals planted outdoors as a spring-flowering perennial. The above-ground parts and the bulbs can cause dermatitis in sensitive individuals.

Humans have been poisoned after ingesting bulbs thought to be onions. Ingesting daffodil bulbs can produce abdominal pains, vomiting, nausea, lightheadedness, shivering, and sometimes diarrhea. Because emesis is rapid, more severe symptoms do not usually occur.

English Ivy

English ivy is an indoor and outdoor ornamental vine. This plant contains saponins that hydrolyze into toxic hederin compounds, causing poisoning in humans. Two chemicals in the sap can also cause severe contact dermatitis and irritation on sensitive skin, usually occurring after pruning.

Humans who ingested the berries have shown symptoms including coma, which is rare but can be severe.

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