

Poisonous Plants

Introduction

Many cultivated and wild plants are, to varying degrees, poisonous to people and animals. It is important to treat unknown plants with caution and teach children to do the same.

Many of these plants are common weeds or ornamental plants and their poisonous qualities are often unsuspected by many. For example common garden shrubs like Oleander (*Nerium oleander*), Rhododendron (*Rhododendron spp.*) and Cestrum (*Cestrum*

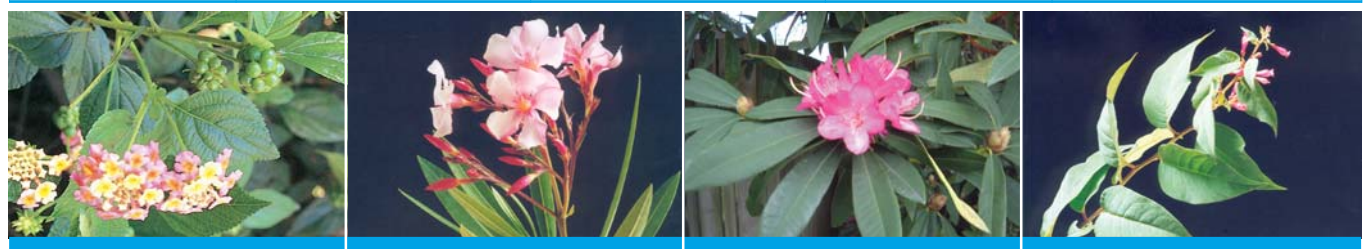
spp.) are extremely toxic to humans and animals. Dumped clippings of these plants have been known to kill livestock which eat them. People are encouraged not to dump garden prunings over fences where stock are grazing.

While it is not suggested that all such poisonous plants should be removed, they should be treated with caution. It is particularly important that children should be made aware of poisonous plants and the parts of them which are poisonous. As so many berries

are poisonous, children should be told never to eat berries of any sort.

With the increasing awareness of environmental and health problems that can be caused by plants, Environment Bay of Plenty has compiled the following chart which lists some of the more common poisonous plants. Note that these plants contain varying levels of toxins, some may be more harmful than others, and that not all parts of them are necessarily toxic.

Plant	Description	Toxic Part	Quantity of fresh plant material to kill a 400kg cattle beast	Symptoms
Lantana (<i>Lantana camara</i>)	Pungent, hairy, prickly shrub to 2-3m high. Flowers in clusters - yellow pink sometimes orange or red. Juicy black berries.	Berries are highly toxic, leaves possibly poisonous. Skin irritant. Poisons cattle readily.	9kgs	Immediate: Vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, dilated pupils. Later: Bleeding, laboured breathing, weakness, sensitivity to light, coma.
Oleander (<i>Nerium oleander</i>)	Ornamental evergreen shrub to 4m high. Leaves long, pointed, leathery. Flowers pink, red or white.	All parts are lethal. One leaf or flower can kill if eaten. Skin irritant. Clippings can kill stock.	10 grams (approx. 10 leaves)	Immediate: Headache, nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, dilated pupils, sweating. Later: Irregular heart rate. Has caused death.
Rhododendron (<i>Rhododendrum spp</i>)	Evergreen or deciduous shrubs or small trees. Leaves usually leathery, narrow, shiny. Flowers in various colours, usually clustered.	All parts extremely toxic. Clippings can kill stock.		Immediate: Vomiting, abdominal pain, breathing difficulties, trembling. Later: Weakness, exhaustion, convulsions, death.
Cestrum (<i>Cestrum spp</i>)	Shrubs to 2-3m high. Leaves pungent, arranged singly on stem. Clustered tubular flowers, red, orange, yellow, white - often fragrant. Berries follow.	All parts.	120 grams (approx. 60 leaves)	Immediate: Accute abdominal pain, tremors, excitement, dry mouth. Later: Dilated pupils, thirst, paralysis, uncoordination.



Lantana

Oleander

Rhododendran

Cestrum

Plant	Description	Toxic Part	Quantity of fresh plant material to kill a 400kg cattle beast	Symptoms
Rhus (<i>Rhus succedanea</i>)	Deciduous tree to 5m. Leaflets in pairs, pointed, turn brilliant orange-red in autumn. Brown berries.	Sap or sawdust causes severe contact dermatitis in many people. Smoke from burning leaves or wood is toxic.		Immediate: Irritation, reddening and blistering of skin. Later: Bubbles on skin, fusing into large blisters. Pus and scabs. Intense swelling; death in rare cases.
Castor Oil Plant (<i>Ricinus communis</i>)	Shrub, green or purple leaves with five lobes. Large spiky seed capsules bean-like seeds.	Seeds, flowers can cause allergies.	800 grams of seeds (Dog: 1 gram)	Immediate: Nausea, vomiting, bloody diarrhoea; cramps. Later: Abdominal pain, convulsions, high temperature, drowsiness, coma, death.
Angels Trumpet (<i>Brugmansia candida</i>) (Also known as Datura)	Large woody shrub or small tree to 4m high. Large soft leaves, large hanging trumpet-shaped white flowers.	All parts, even when dry.		Immediate: Disturbed vision, nausea, vomiting, fast pulse, dilated pupils, thirst. Later: Drowsiness, disturbed breathing, delirium, fever, hallucinations, blindness, paralysis, death.
Black Nightshade (<i>Solanum nigrum</i>) + other spp.	Low growing annual herb. Stem and leaves often purplish. Small white flowers. Berries dull black (sometimes green, yellow or red).	Leaves and green berries.		Immediate: Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Later: Dry mouth, thirst, dilated pupils, drowsiness, inco-ordination, convulsion, delirium.
Box (<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>)	Evergreen shrub. Leaves small, oval, dark green, leathery. Tiny pale-green flowers. Three-celled seed capsule, black seeds.	All parts are highly toxic. Stock often poisoned by discarded clippings.	300 grams	Immediate: Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pains. Later: Drowsiness, convulsions, breathing difficulties.
Jerusalem Cherry (<i>Solanum pseudocapsicum</i>)	Wiry stemmed shrub to 1-2m high. Leaves dark green, shining. Flowers - white. Berries orange to scarlet, glossy, long-lasting.	All parts. The berries are extremely toxic. Berries are attractive to children.		Immediate: Nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea. Later: Dry mouth, dilated pupils, difficult breathing drowsiness, convulsions.
Tutu (<i>Coriaria all species</i>)	Small shrubs to small trees. Leaves dark green, oval, veined with pointed tip. Many tiny green flowers hanging in clusters. Purple/black berries.	All parts. Very toxic to humans and animals.	120 grams	Immediate: Excitement, convulsions, vomiting, breathing problems. Later: Exhaustion, memory loss, coma, death.



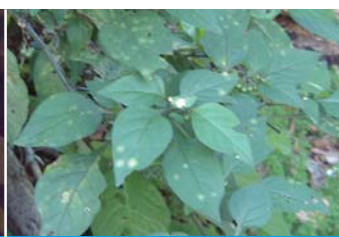
Rhus



Castor Oil Plant



Angels Trumpet



Black Nightshade



Plant	Description	Toxic Part	Quantity of fresh plant material to kill a 400kg cattle beast	Symptoms
Italian Arum (<i>Arum italicum</i>)	Tuberous rooted plant to 60cm high. Often variegated or spotted leaves. White flower, orange/red berries.	All parts		Immediate: Burning of mouth, throat and stomach. Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea. Later: Shock, convulsions, exhaustion, death.
Arum Lily (<i>Zantedeschia species</i>)	Tuberous rooted plant to 1.5m high. Large leaves, white flower with yellow stalk inside.	All parts		Immediate: Burning of mouth, throat and stomach. Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea. Later: Shock, convulsions, exhaustion, death.
Thornapple (<i>Datura stramonium</i>)	Pungent annual herb to 1.5m high. Lobed leaves. White trumpet-shaped flowers. Prickly green seed capsules, dark brown seeds.	All parts, especially seeds, are highly toxic even when dry.		Immediate: Disturbed vision, nausea, vomiting, fast pulse, dilated pupils, thirst. Later: Hallucinations, drowsiness, disturbed breathing, delirium, fever, paralysis, blindness, death.
Ivy (<i>Hedera helix</i>)	Evergreen woody stemmed climber. Leaves green 3-5 lobed. Small black berries.	Berries and leaves. All parts cause contact dermatitis to people who are sensitive to ivy. Dust may cause sneezing and eye problems.		Immediate: Irritation and swelling of sensitive skin, diarrhoea. Later: Excitement or drunkenness, laboured breathing, coma.
Hemlock (<i>Conium maculatum</i>)	Smelly erect herb to 2m high. Leaves carrot-like. Many tiny white flowers. Stems hollow with purple flecks, especially near base.	All parts are deadly, even when dry. Can cause dermatitis. Stock occasionally poisoned, mainly by dried material.	2kgs	Immediate: Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dilated pupils. Later: Temperature drop, delirium, possible blindness, paralysis, muscular weakness, coma, convulsions, death.
Yew (<i>Taxus species</i>)	Evergreen conifer tree to 15m high. Bark reddish, flaky small leaves, cones and red berries.	All parts are highly toxic. Often kills cattle.	500g (horse 100g)	Immediate: Excitement, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, weak breathing. Later: Trembling, drowsiness, paralysis, coma, death.
Daphne (<i>Daphne spp</i>)	Small shrubs. Leaves clustered at branch ends. Flowers fragrant, whitish pink/purple in clusters. Small red/black berries.	All parts, even when dry.	30 grams	Immediate: Burning mouth and stomach, swollen tongue and lips, vomiting, diarrhoea. Later: Weakness, rapid pulse, convulsions, death.



Tutu



Italian Arum



Thorn Apple



Ivy

Other plants which can be poisonous, or which may have poisonous parts, include the following:

Scientific and common names of poisonous plant species:

Aconitum species (especially *Aconitum napellus*) - **monkshood**
Aesculus species - **horse chestnuts**
Acokanthera oppositifolia - **bushman's poison**
Agapanthus species - **agapanthus**
Agaricus species - **poisonous mushrooms**
Alectryon excelsus - **titoki**
Alocasia species - **elephant's ear**
Amanita muscaria - **fly agaric**
A. phalloides - **death cap**
Amaryllis species - **amaryllids**
Araujia sericifera - **moth plant**, cruel plant
Atropa bella-donna - **deadly nightshade**
Catharanthus roseus - **tropical periwinkle**
Colocasia esculenta - **taro**
Conium maculatum - **hemlock**
Consolida species - **larkspurs**
Convallaria majalis - **lily of the valley**
Corynocarpus laevigatus - **karaka**
Cotinus species - **smoke bushes**
Cotoneaster species - **cotoneasters**
Cytisus scoparius - **broom**
Daphne species - **daphnes**
Delphinium species - **delphiniums**
Dianella nigra - **turutu**, blueberry lily
Dieffenbachia species - **dumb canes**
Digitalis purpurea - **foxglove**
Euonymus europaeus - **spindle tree**
E. japonicus - **Japanese spindle berry**
Euphorbia species - **spurges**
E. pulcherrima - **poinsettia**
Fatsia japonica - **fatsia**
Gloriosa superba - **gloriosa lily**
Gomphocarpus species - **swan plants**
G. physocarpus - **swan plants**
Helleborus species - **hellebores**
Hippeastrum species - see **amaryllis**
Hypericum androsaemum - **tutsan**
Hypericum perforatum - **St John's wort**

Ilex aquifolium - **holly**, English holly
Ipomoea species - **morning glories**
Iris foetidissima - **stinking iris**
Laburnum anagyroides - **laburnum**
Ligustrum species - **privets**
Lupinus species - **lupins**
Lycium ferocissimum - **boxthorn**
Mandevilla suaveolens - **Chilean jasmine**
Melia azederach - **Persian lilac**, white cedar
Myoporum species - **ngaio**
Nicandra physalodes - **apple of Peru**
Papaver nudicaule - **Iceland poppy**
P. somniferum - **opium poppy**
Phytolacca octandra - **inkweed**
Pieris species - **lily of the valley shrubs**
Primula species - **garden primulas**
Prunus laurocerasus - **cherry laurel**
Pseudopanax arboreus - **five finger**
Pyracantha species - **firethorns**
Ranunculus sceleratus - **celery-leaved buttercup**
Rheum rhabarbarum - **rhubarb**
Schinus molle - **pepper tree**
Solanum species – inc. species commonly called **nightshades**
S. aviculare - **poroporo**
S. dulcamara - **bittersweet**
S. laciniatum - **poroporo**
S. linnaeanum - **apple of Sodom**
S. mauritanum - **woolly nightshade**
S. physalifolium - **hairy nightshade**
S. tuberosum - **potato**
Sophora species - **kowhai**
Synphytum officinale - **comfrey**
S. xuplandicum - **comfrey**
Urtica species - **nettles**
Wisteria species - **wisteria**

Important

If someone appears to have been poisoned by a plant—or any other substance—you can phone 03 474 7000 at any time, day or night, and the Poisons Centre will advise you what to do to reduce the effects of the poisoning. For non urgent information phone 03 479 1200.

Environment Bay of Plenty acknowledges Northland Regional Council and Landcare Research New Zealand for information contained within this factsheet.



For further information and advice, contact your local pest plant officer at Environment Bay of Plenty:

Telephone: 0800 ENV BOP (368 267)
 Facsimile: 0800 ENV FAX (368 329)
 Pollution Hotline: 0800 73 83 93
 Email: info@envbop.govt.nz
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This fact sheet was prepared by Environment Bay of Plenty's Pest Plant Section

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