



Plants affecting human health

A range of garden plants are considered poisonous or toxic. Poisonings and deaths in humans from garden plants are rare as most poisonous plants taste unpleasant and are seldom swallowed. However it is best to know which plants are potentially toxic.

Small children are often more at risk from coloured berries, petals and leaves that look succulent. The danger also varies depending on dose that is consumed. Some plants are capable of causing serious illness or death with only a small amount of exposure while other require large quantities to be consumed before even mild symptoms occur.

Poisoning from plants may occur from ingesting, inhalation or direct contact. Symptoms from ingestion include gastroenteritis, diarrhoea, vomiting, nervous symptoms and serious cases, respiratory and cardiac distress.

Allergic reactions to pollens is also a danger to humans. The inhalation of pollen, dust or fumes from burning plants can cause symptoms similar to hayfever or asthma.

Contact poisoning or irritation, meaning on the skin or in the eyes can occur from direct contact with plant sap, fine hairs or burrs or prickles; this can result in swelling, dermatitis, rashes or blistering.

Anyone suspected of plant poisoning should contact the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26 and take a piece of the plant for identification.

Many weeds and invasive species are well known to be toxic to stock and domestic animals. For examples dogs and cats can be poisoned by *Duranta erecta* or dogs can become severely sick after consuming Wandering Jew.

Some people have developed skin reaction after being in contact with St John's wort, Bathurst burr or parthenium weed.

The list of plants affecting human health is extensive, however there are few reports of human deaths. The Nursery and Gardening Industry of Australia's plant labelling guidelines outline the need for plant nurseries and growers to correctly label the botanical name and indications of potentially harmful plants.

More information

- Contact your local retail garden centre or the Nursery and Garden Industry Australia http://www.ngia.com.au/publication_resources/overview.asp
- Contact your local government or weeds officer
- Contact your state or territory government environment or primary industries department