A lot of us take pride in our attractive landscapes and the wonderful plants we have available for use in Florida, but did you know that some of the plants that we use to beautify our homes could be poisonous to our family and pets? The term "poisonous" does not imply fatal, however, some plants may be only mildly toxic, causing stomachaches or skin irritations. We need to be cautious in the landscape. A plant that causes a slight upset stomach to an adult may have a more severe reaction in a child or elderly person.

Many gardeners and homeowners do not realize that some of the most common landscape plants, houseplants, and weeds contain highly toxic substances. Although most plants have an unpleasant taste or consistency that would cause most people not to chew them for very long or swallow them, some may not taste bad at all and be sampled, unaware of the consequences.

The circumstances change with regards to children. Young children have a tendency to chew on anything that they can get their hands on. They are also commonly attracted to brightly colored berries on plants and may inadvertently eat them as they would other small fruit that is given to them. To save yourself a lot of grief, it is important to know what plants and plant parts are poisonous in your landscape. The exact poisoning symptoms will be varied, depending on the age, weight, and health status of a person and the quantity and form of the plant ingested.

It is important to know what parts of the plants are poisonous and the reactions they cause. Plants can be very deceitful. Although one part of the plant may be edible, another part can be highly toxic. Some plants may also have all poisonous parts, while others only have poisonous leaves, fruit, seeds, or sap (fluid). There are plants that may only be poisonous if consumed and others that will cause skin irritations when slightly touched.

Some of the most commonly used landscape plants that are poisonous in one way or another include: Yellow Allamanda (Allamanda cathartica), Crown-of-Thorns (Euphorbia milii), Dieffenbachia (Dieffenbachia seguine), Oleander (Nerium oleander), Lantana (Lantana camara), Chinaberry (Melia azedarach), Coontie (Zamia floridana), Fishtail Pam (Caryota mitis), Poinsettia (Euphorbia Pulcherrima), Oyster Plant (Rhoea spathacea), Elephant’s Ear (Xanthosoma sagittifolium), Sago Palm (Cyaca circinalis), Night Blooming Jasmine (Cestrum nocturnum) and the mango tree (Mangifera indica).

It is not the intent of this article to discourage you from planting poisonous landscape plants, but to make you aware of the potential hazard when you use them. In order to prevent poisoning accidents from plants:

- Know the plants in your landscape. Be aware of the ones that are poisonous and what parts of the plants are poisonous.
- Know the poisonous weeds that may invade your landscape and keep an eye out for their intrusion.
- Teach children that putting leaves, stems, flowers, seeds, berries, and wild mushrooms in their mouths is dangerous. Keep plants out of reach and sight of small children.
- Watch pets and make sure they do not consume poisonous plants.
- Keep a bottle of Syrup of Ipecac in your home (do not use unless instructed to do so by your physician or the Poison Information Center).
- If you suspect your child has consumed a poisonous plant or do not know if a plant they consumed is poisonous, call the Poison Information Center (1-800-282-3171) or go to a doctor immediately. Always take a sample of the plant, seeds, or berries with you for identification.

If you are concerned about the plants mentioned above or other plants in your landscape please call the
Osceola County Master Gardeners. They will be able to give you further details on what part of the plants mentioned are poisonous. The Osceola County Master Gardeners are available on Mondays to Fridays from 10 am to 2 pm to answer your gardening questions.

"Attracting Wildlife and Discouraging Unwanted Wildlife" will be held May 13th from 9am to noon at the Agricultural Center. Please call to register and for more information.

"Basic Landscape Design" will be held at the Central Library in Kissimmee on May 23rd, May 30th, and June 6th at 6pm. These classes are in progression of each other, so you should plan to attend all of them to get the most out of the workshop. Please call to register. Space is limited.

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