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Poisonous Plants

Illinois Poison Center warns of indoor and outdoor toxic plants

(CHICAGO) – The risk of poisonous plants is a danger for you and your family both inside and outdoors. There are many toxic plants that can cause serious harm that’s why the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) urges you to be aware of your surroundings and use caution when choosing plants for gardening this year.

“Many people plant or landscape shrubs and trees in their gardens without even knowing that they could be poisonous to their family and pets,” said Dr. Michael Wahl, medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. “The IPC recommends that homeowners first find out which plants are potentially toxic before deciding on which ones they want to garden with.”

Use extreme caution around the following plants: Lily-of-the Valley, Azalea, Rhododendron, Amaryllis, Morning glory and Yew. Symptoms of plant poisoning vary depending on the type. Some plants can cause skin rash or irritation, which may be serious and painful. Others can cause vomiting or diarrhea, if eaten...more serious problems of the heart, kidneys or other organs, and possibly even death. The Illinois Poison Center’s toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222, provides advice to Illinois residents and health care professionals about the treatment of poisonings, overdoses, occupational accidents, hazardous material incidents, venomous bites and other poison-related concerns.

Prevent Exposure to Toxic Plants with These Safety Tips:

- Keep all houseplants out of children’s reach
- Know the names of all your plants, both indoors and outdoors. Label each plant with the correct common and botanical name. Consult a local greenhouse, nursery or florist to identify unknown plants.
- Teach children never to put mushrooms, berries or any part of a plant (including leaves, flowers, stems, bulbs or seeds) into their mouths
- Do not assume a plant is non-toxic because birds or wildlife eat it

- Program the IPC phone number (1-800-222-1222) in your cell phone and keep it near all telephones

In Case of a Plant Exposure, Call the IPC immediately then follow these first-aid steps:

- Exposure to the mouth: Remove any plant parts from the victim's mouth. Give a small amount of water.
- Exposure to the skin: Wash any skin exposed to the plant with soap and cool water immediately. Remove any clothing that had been in contact with the plant.
- Exposure to the eyes: Rinse eyes with lukewarm water for 15 minutes.

It is possible to treat most poisoning exposures safely and effectively at home, by calling the IPC and providing the name of the plant and the approximate amount ingested. The IPC's staff consists of pharmacists, toxicologists, nurses and other poison information providers who can quickly determine the degree of toxicity or hazard, and will offer recommendations for managing the plant poisoning. They will advise callers to see a physician or visit an emergency room if a doctor's care is needed. In addition, the poison specialist will make a follow-up call and suggest further care, if needed.

Mildly and Highly Toxic Plants:

Mildly Toxic: Plants that are mildly to moderately toxic include aloe, daisies, foxtail, poison ivy, cottonwood and crab apple seeds. Contact with some of the plants, weeds, shrubs and trees that are mildly toxic could cause a skin rash, which can be both serious and painful. Other plants that are considered mildly or moderately toxic can cause minor illnesses, such as vomiting or diarrhea, if eaten in large amounts. Always call the IPC at 1800-222-1222 if any mildly toxic plant is eaten.

Highly Toxic: Yew bushes, Foxglove and castor bean are just a few of the highly toxic plants that are considered dangerous. Ingesting a small amount of these plants may cause serious illness or even death.

Call the IPC immediately if someone has eaten a plant that is considered highly toxic.

For more information about plant toxicity, or to order a free brochure featuring the list of toxic plants, call the Illinois Poison Center, at 1-800-222-1222, or visit its Web site at www.illinoispoisoncenter.org

The Illinois Poison Center serves all of Illinois – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice on household products, medication issues, alcohol and drug misuse, bites and stings and other poisonings. The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council.