

## These Common Garden Plants Are Poisonous To You And Your Pets

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, July 5, 2019



Nick Harby discovers a patch of poke weed along the Wabash Heritage Trail in Lafayette, Indiana. All parts of the poke weed are poisonous to humans, pets and livestock, the root being the most toxic part of the plant. (Photo: John Terhune/Journal & Courier)

**Q:** I have a poke weed (*Phytolacca decandra*) growing in my garden. My neighbor says to remove it; it's poisonous. I'm confused because I thought people ate poke greens.

Can you tell me more about the poke weed? Is there an easy way to tell if a plant is poisonous?

**A:** All parts of the poke weed are poisonous to humans, pets and livestock, the root being the most toxic part of the plant. If you plan to pull it up, make sure to use gloves; the toxic sap can be absorbed through your skin.

People do eat the young poke greens but they have to be boiled and the water drained off three times before they're safe to eat. Personally, I would need to be desperate for some fresh vegetables before eating something that needed that type of preparation.

The plant is decorative, especially the berries. I recommend you remove it as children and pets are tempted to eat the blueish black berries and can become very sick from eating them.

The poke weed is not the only common poisonous plant that we find growing in the yard. There are about 400 poisonous plants common to California. Plants are considered poisonous if they cause some type of negative reaction to humans exposed to them. Poisonous plants are ranked on their toxicity class as follows:



Lupine is a class-one toxicity plant. It can be deadly if ingested. (Photo: Courtesy Cathy Acciari)

**Class 1 plants:** Major toxicity. If ingested, it may cause serious illness or death. Poke weed is a class 1 plant and is joined in this category by rhubarb leaves; the seeds from apples, apricots, black cherries, peaches and pears; Angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia*), azalea, lantana, lupine, mistletoe, toyon, oleander and vinca.

**Class 2 plants:** Minor toxicity. If ingested, it may cause vomiting or diarrhea. Some common class 2 plants include arborvitae, chrysanthemum, daffodil bulbs - including narcissus and jonquil, daisy, Dutch iris, gladiolus, hyacinth, iris, mistletoe, oak tree acorns, ornamental sweet allium and yarrow (*Achillea*).



This March 31, 2016 photo shows daffodil drifts growing in a pasture near Langley, Wash. Daffodils may be among the first flowers to show their colors in spring but their bulbs contain poisons that can cause vomiting, seizures and even death should they be eaten by certain pets or livestock. Learn to recognize toxic plants and their symptoms. (Photo: Dean Fosdick, AP)

**Class 3 plants:** Oxalates. These can irritate the skin, mouth, tongue or throat. Class 3 plants have juice or sap that contain needle-shaped oxalate crystals that can irritate the skin, mouth, tongue or throat, resulting in throat swelling, breathing difficulties, burning pain and stomach upset. Some common garden plants in this category include begonia, Chinese evergreen, Iceland poppy, jack-in-the-pulpit, calla lily, split-leaf philodendron and rhubarb leaves.

**Class 4 plants:** Dermatitis. If the thorn, sap or juice comes in contact with your skin, it may cause skin rashes or irritation. Most class 4 plants just cause dermatitis, and not everyone may have a reaction. Common plants in this category include achillea (yarrow), agapanthus (lily-of-the-Nile), alstroemeria, amaryllis, baby's breath, Bermuda grass, carnation, Carolina jasmine, clematis, cyclamen, daisy, dogwood, flax, fleabane, hyacinth, hollyhock, lobelia, poison oak, primrose, smoke bush and tansy.



Oleanders have a class 4 toxicity level. (Photo: @overgrown\_treeland)

Some plants appear in more than one category. This is because a plant may have multiple effects on people, causing multiple miseries.

Also not everybody will have the same reaction to a plant. For example, some folks can get a terrible case of poison oak just from walking by the bush, while others don't get a reaction even after they have cut it back.

Remember that pets can also have negative reactions from ingesting or touching toxic plants.

For more information and a reference on common Poisonous Plants download ANR Publication 8560 at <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8560.pdf>.

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