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## Summer Plants: Safe or Not?

*Beware of potentially toxic plants outside*

Summer is nature's time to show off: From colors that pop to scents that allure, the season's plants demand attention. As Illinoisans venture outside for summer fun, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) reminds you that some of the season's most attractive plants can be harmful—or even deadly.

“Most people know to avoid poison ivy, but they don't realize their own backyard might contain plants that are very dangerous if consumed,” says IPC Medical Director Michael Wahl, M.D. “It's important to understand the potential dangers in summer plants especially if you have young children around.”

These seasonal plants pose the most severe hazard to your health if consumed in certain quantities:

- **Larkspur**—A garden staple, these cheerful perennials can cause adverse neurological and cardiac effects.
- **Foxglove**—Beloved for its bell-shaped flowers, these tall plants can slow your heart rate and cause confusion.
- **Cotoneaster**—A popular groundcover, the seeds and berries break down into cyanide when consumed.

Other plants are only harmful if consumed in large quantities:

- **Allium**—Also known as wild onion or garlic, large amounts of this bulbous plant can upset your stomach.
- **Tomato and Potato**—If consumed before proper ripeness, these plants can lead to nausea and vomiting, as can the leaves (regardless of ripeness).
- **Pokeweed**—The berries on this shrub resembles blueberries, but consuming too much can cause significant gastrointestinal problems.
- **Black-eyed Susans**—This common prairie plant can irritate the skin upon contact.

IPC suggests admiring all plants from afar if you aren't sure of a plant's identity. See IPC's helpful [plant list](#) that rates plant toxicity from 0 (nontoxic) to 3 (severe and life threatening).

In 2019, the IPC fielded 1,158 exposures related to plant toxicity, 37% of which were during the summer. Nationally more than 14,000 exposures were reported to poison centers.

"We want everyone to enjoy their summer," says IPC Assistant Vice President Carol DesLauriers, Pharm.D. "Please err on the side of caution—no matter how tasty a plant looks."

If you or someone around you is exposed to any of the plants listed above, call the IPC helpline at 1-800-222-1222. IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays. The call is free and confidential.

See an [IPC blog post](#) on summer plants for more information on toxic, mildly toxic and safe foliage. Visit the [IPC's website](#) for additional educational resources and topics.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses and pharmacists.