

Harmful garden plants in Western Australia



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Harmful garden plants in Western Australia





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Harmful garden plants in Western Australia

Many garden plants can cause harm. Some are commercially available and very popular; others are no longer readily available but still exist in older gardens; and yet others are favourite indoor ornamentals, cut-flowers, weeds, or even fruit and vegetables that we consume frequently, often without realising that other parts of those same plants are harmful.

It is impractical and unnecessary to remove from our gardens every single plant that could conceivably be harmful. A more sensible approach is to be aware of the potential danger of a particular plant, and then assess how much or how little risk it poses to the people and animals that live on or visit your property.

The Department of Agriculture and Food's 'Pest and Disease Information Service' (Free call 1800 084 881) can identify most plants and provide information on their harmful properties.

There are three basic ways in which plants can act as irritants and cause harm: when eaten, when touched, or when inhaled.

Irritant when eaten

Different toxic properties in different plants produce a range of symptoms when eaten. Some cause gastro-intestinal upsets with vomiting and diarrhoea. Others cause burning and swelling of the mouth and throat, sometimes leading to difficulty in swallowing or breathing. Yet others affect the nervous system or result in organ damage. Certain plants are so poisonous that they may cause serious illness or even death, depending on the amount consumed.

In general, all people react similarly after eating a particular poisonous plant. Some plants are poisonous to people but not to stock or other animals. (Be aware of the fact that trees and woody shrubs that contain toxins may also produce toxic smoke if you burn the prunings.)

For cases of suspected poisoning, telephone the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26), which has a national computer link indicating the toxicity of most plants, together with poisoning symptoms and appropriate treatment.

If medical (or veterinary) treatment is needed, try to take with you a sample of the plant that you believe has poisoned the patient. Correct botanical identification is essential because it helps the medical professional to determine which toxins are involved and which treatment is the most appropriate.

Irritant when touched

There are many ways in which different plants cause harm when touched. Caustic sap burns the skin and is especially injurious if accidentally transferred from the hands to the mouth or eyes; indeed, in extreme cases, some caustic sap can cause blindness. Caustic juice is another danger, with that of chilli being the prime example.

Sharp-tipped leaves and thorns that puncture the skin sometimes cause blistering and burning, but sharp-tipped leaves and thorns are usually visible and so more easily avoided. By contrast, sharp-edged leaves, like those of pampas grass, are an unseen danger that can cause serious lacerations.

Caustic sap affects virtually everyone in a similar way, but other kinds of sap, and also fine hairs on stems and leaves, may trigger an allergic reaction in sensitive people only, causing contact dermatitis. Some people can handle Grevillea species and cultivars, for example, without being affected while others suffer a severe allergic reaction.





For cases of suspected caustic sap injuries or contact dermatitis, telephone the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) and seek medical treatment if necessary.

Irritant when inhaled

The pollen and sometimes the perfume of certain plants, when inhaled, can trigger asthma or hay fever—but only in those people for whom those specific plants are the individual triggers. The most common irritant when inhaled is fine wind-borne pollen from grasses and catkin-bearing trees. However, the severity of the reaction depends on the person, and it is possible for one person to be allergic to just a single plant. Because of this distinction, plants that trigger allergic respiratory complaints cannot be adequately covered in this book.

For a list of known inhaled irritants and a list of low allergen garden plants, telephone the Asthma Foundation of Western Australia on Freecall 1800 645 130.

Assessing actual risk compared to potential for harm

Before removing favourite plants from the garden just because they have a capacity to cause harm, you might like to consider whether or not they really do pose a threat. Actual risk depends on a number of variable factors.

A highly poisonous plant may present little risk to the community at large if it is rarely grown. A highly poisonous plant may also present very little risk in your own garden if it is inaccessible to children or if it is an exotic that rarely grows big enough in Western Australia to be able to produce, for instance, poisonous bark or fruits.

On the other hand, a plant of low to medium toxicity may present a big risk if it is commonly planted in large numbers at a level where curious toddlers, young pets or hungry stock are tempted to taste it – daffodil is a good example.

Another point to consider is that what may appear to be an obvious danger is not necessarily the danger that will most often materialise.

Parents worry about children being attracted to brightly coloured berries — and, indeed, statistics show that children occasionally do eat the berries of arum lily, for example. Poisonous berries usually taste so bitter or burn the mouth so badly, however, that the likelihood of many being eaten is reduced.

Adults may be at greater risk of sustaining harm if they confidently start pruning garden plants or pulling weeds without realising that contact dermatitis or injury from caustic sap can result.

Necklaces and decorations made of seeds may contain poisonous ones, so do not let children chew them.

Widely held misconceptions about the beneficial qualities of certain plants are another unexpected area of risk. Some herbs may aid health when used in small quantities or for short periods whereas prolonged, excessive usage may cause harm. Aloe vera is generally perceived as beneficial since its soothing qualities are promoted in commercially available skin-care products that contain its inner gel – yet all other parts of the plant can cause poisoning if eaten and the sap is caustic.

A sinister influence to be aware of, especially if your children use the Internet, is the fact that a number of websites encourage experimentation with plants that are known to possess or are suspected of possessing hallucinogenic properties.

Correct identification

Plants in this book are listed alphabetically under common names, simply because common names are what most people recognise. However, common names can be confusing because one name is sometimes applied to more than one plant. Naked lady, for example, is an alternative common name for pencil bush (Euphorbia tirucalli), a small tree, while naked ladies is an alternative common name for belladonna lily (Amaryllis belladonna), a bulbous plant. Whenever possible, learn and use the botanical name or, at least, the genus (the first part of the botanical name), as this assists in correct identification.

In particular, it is important to be able to recognise the genus, because all or most of the species within that genus may have harmful properties in common, as the following example demonstrates. Among the many plants that some people loosely call cacti are certain spherical, succulent species of Euphorbia. They look nothing like other species of Euphorbia because this is a diverse genus that embraces crown of thorns, pencil bush, poinsettia, and spurges (both weeds and ornamentals). The critical fact to know is that they are all Euphorbia species and therefore all have caustic sap.

Another example of common name confusion is deadly nightshade (Atropa belladonna), which is not present in Western Australia. However, black or blackberry nightshade (Solanum nigrum) does grow in Western Australia, where it is often mistakenly called deadly nightshade.

Explanation of ratings in the A to Z of harmful garden plants in Western Australia

These are general ratings. They may change under your particular conditions - for example, if there are many pets or small children in your household or garden that might be exposed to these plants.

Harm key:

- (L)-M low to medium harm potential
- M-H medium to high harm potential
- (H) high harm potential
- **E** irritant when eaten
- T irritant when touched
- S also harmful to stock and other animals

The following A to Z list of plants is not comprehensive. It is intended as a guide only.

If a plant is rated 'T', do not assume that the absence of a rating 'E' means it is safe to eat, because the absence of the 'E' rating may simply mean that no cases of poisoning by eating have been recorded.

Similarly, where the 'S' rating is absent, this does not mean a plant is safe for stock or other animals to eat - it just means records cannot prove it is harmful.

Never experiment by eating any plants or parts of plants that are not well known as being edible.

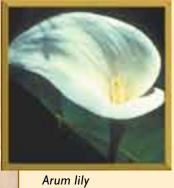




Apple of Sodom



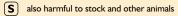
Angel's trumpet

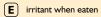


Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Aconite, monkshood	Aconitum napellus	all	EHS
African milk bush	Synadenium grantii	sap	L-MST
Agapanthus, lily of the Nile	Agapanthus praecox	sap, leaves	L-M T
Agave, century plant	Agave americana	sap	M-H T
Allamanda	Allamanda cathartica	all	E L-M T
Aloe vera	Aloe vera	all	EM-HST
Angel's trumpet	Brugmansia spp (syn. Datura spp)	all, including nectar	EH
Apple of Sodom	Solanum sodomaeum, S. linnaeanum	fruit, other parts	E L-M
Aquilegia, columbine, granny's bonnets	Aquilegia spp	seeds	E L-M
Apricot	Prunus armeniaca	kernels	E M-H S
Arum lily, calla lily	Zantedeschia aethiopica	all, especially flower spike and berries	E H
Asclepias, milkweed - (see also narrow-leaf cotton bush)	Asclepias curassavica	roots, sap	L-M T
Autumn crocus	Colchicum autumnale	leaves, corm, seeds	EHS
Avocado	Persea americana	leaves	E L-M S
Azalea (and rhododendron)	Rhododendron spp and cultivars	all (and honey from bees that visit the flowers)	E M-H S

M-**H** medium to high harm potential







Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Belladonna lily, Easter lily, naked ladies	Amaryllis belladonna	bulb	E L-M T
Bitter almond	Prunus dulcis	kernels	E H
Black bean, Moreton Bay chestnut	Castanospermum australe	seeds	E L-M
Black locust, false acacia, robinia	Robinia psuedoacacia and cultivars	all	EHS
Black or blackberry nightshade (incorrectly called deadly nightshade)	Solanum nigrum	unripe fruit, all green parts	E H
Bluebell	Hyacinthoides hispanica	bulb	E L-M
Bookleaf	Thuja occidentalis	leaves	L-M T S
Вох	Buxus spp	all	L-M T
Brachychiton, flame tree, kurrajong	Brachychiton spp	hairs on seeds	L-M T
Bracken fern	Pteridium esculentum	all	E L-M S
Brazilian, broad-leaf, Californian or Japanese pepper tree - (see also pepper tree)	Schinus terebinthifolia	fruit, leaves	E L-M T
Bushman's poison, wintersweet	Acokanthera spectabilis	all	E H
Caladium	Caladium spp	all	E L-M T
Californian pepper tree – see Brazilian pepper tree - (and also pepper tree)			



Belladonna lily



Bracken fern



Bushman's poison

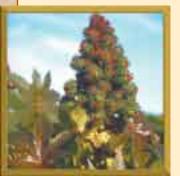
L-M low to medium harm potential

M-**H** medium to high harm potential

H high harm potential



Camphor laurel



Castor oil plant



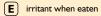
Chalice vine

Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Calla lily – see arum lily			
Camphor laurel	Cinnamomum camphora	all	E L-M S T
Cape honey flower	Melianthus comosus	root	E L-M
Cape lilac, white cedar	Melia azedarach	all	EH
Cardinal flower	Lobelia cardinalis	all	EHST
Cassava	Manihot esculenta	raw root	E L-M
Castor oil plant	Ricinus communis	seeds	EH
Catha, khat	Catha edulis	seeds, leaves	E L-M
Century plant – see agave			
Cestrum, jessamine	Cestrum spp	all, especially fruit	E L-M
Chalice vine	Solandra spp	sap, leaves, flowers	EHS
Cherry laurel	Prunus laurocerasus	leaves, fruit	EH
Chilli	Capsicum spp	fruit, seeds	E M-H T
Chincherinchee and other ornithogalums	Ornithogalum spp	bulb, flower spike	HST
Chinese tallow tree	Sapium sebiferum	fruit, leaves, sap	E L-M S T
Chrysanthemum	Chrysanthemum spp	all	L-M T

M-**H** medium to high harm potential

H high harm potential

S also harmful to stock and other animals



Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Clematis (including traveller's joy)	Clematis spp	all	E L-M S T
Clivia	Clivia miniata	all	E L-M S T
Columbine – see aquilegia			
Common ivy, English ivy	Hedera helix	all	L-M T
Coral bush	Jatropha podagrica	fruit, seeds	E L-M T
Crocus (autumn) – see autumn crocus			
Crown of thorns	Euphorbia milii and cultivars	sap, thorns	L-M T
Cuckoo pint, Italian arum	Arum italicum	all	E L-M
Cycad (various - see also zamia)	Cycas and Macrozamia spp	seeds, leaves	E L-M S
Cyclamen	Cyclamen spp	tuber	E L-M S
Daffodil (including jonquil)	Narcissus spp	sap, leaves, bulb	E L-M S
Deadly nightshade - (see note under 'Correct identification' in introduction)			
Delphinium (including larkspur)	Delphinium spp	seeds, leaves	E H
Dieffenbachia, dumbcane	Dieffenbachia spp	stems, leaves	E L-M
Dumbcane – see dieffenbachia			



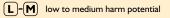
Clivia

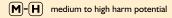


Coral bush



Delphinium





H high harm potential

E irritant when eaten

(T) irritant when touched



Euonymus



False jasmine

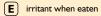


Foxglove

Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Duranta, pigeon berry	Duranta repens	fruit	EHS
Dutchman's pipe	Aristolochia spp	all, including sap	L-M T
Easter lily – see belladonna lily			
Elephant's ear and taro	Alocasia spp	leaves, uncooked roots	E L-M T
English ivy - see common ivy			
Euonymus, spindle tree (including Japanese spindle)	Euonymus spp	fruit, seeds	E L-M
Euphorbia (various), spurge (see note under 'Correct identification' in introduction)	Euphorbia spp	sap	M-H T
False acacia – see black locust			
False jasmine, yellow jasmine	Gelsemium spp	all, including nectar	E M-H S
Fishtail palm	Caryota mitis	fruit	HT
Flame tree – see brachychiton			
Foxglove	Digitalis purpurea	all	EHS
Frangipani	Plumeria spp	sap	L-M T
Fritillaria, snake's head fritillary	Fritillaria meleagris	bulb	E L-M
Fruit salad plant, Swiss cheese plant	Monstera deliciosa	unripe fruit	E L-M
Gleditsia, honey locust	Gleditsia triacanthos	all	E L-M S

M-**H** medium to high harm potential





Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Gloriosa lily, glory vine	Gloriosa superba	all, especially root	EHS
Golden chain tree, laburnum	Laburnum anagyroides	all, especially seeds	E L-M
Granny's bonnets – see aquilegia			
Grevillea, especially cultivar 'Robyn Gordon'	Grevillea spp	all	L-M T
Hellebore	Helleborus spp and cultivars	all	E H
Hemlock	Conium maculatum	all	E H
Holly	llex aquifolium	fruit	E L-M
Honey locust – see gleditsia			
Horse chestnut	Aesculus spp	fruit	E L-M
Hoya, wax flower	Hoya australis	leaves	E L-M S
Hyacinth	Hyacinthus orientalis	all, especially bulb	L-MST
Italian arum - see cuckoo pint			
Iris	Iris spp	leaves, bulbs, root	L-M T
Japanese pepper tree - see Brazilian pepper tree - (see also pepper tree)			
Japanese spindle – see euonymus			



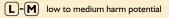
Golden chain tree



Hemlock



Hyacinth



M-**H** medium to high harm potential

H high harm potential

E irritant when eaten







Lily of the valley

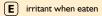


Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Jerusalem cherry, ornamental chilli	Solanum pseudocapsicum	fruit	E H S
Jessamine - see cestrum			
Jonquil – see daffodil			
Juniper	Juniperus spp	leaves, fleshy cones	E L-M T
Khat – see catha			
Kurrajong – see brachychiton			
Laburnum - see golden chain tree			
Lantana	Lantana spp	fruit, thorns	E L-M S T
Larkspur – see delphinium			
Lily of the Nile – see agapanthus			
Lily of the valley	Convallaria majalis	all	E L-M
Lobelia (see also cardinal flower)	Lobelia spp	all	E L-M S
Loquat	Eriobotrya japonica	seeds	EHS
Lupin	Lupinus spp	seeds	EHS
Marguerite (and Shasta daisy)	Argyranthemum hybrids	all	L-M T
Monkshood – see aconite			

M-**H** medium to high harm potential

H high harm potential

S also harmful to stock and other animals



Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Milkweed – see asclepias			
Moreton Bay chestnut - see black bean			
Morning glory	lpomea spp	seeds	E H S
Naked ladies - see belladonna lily			
Naked lady, pencil bush	Euphorbia tirucalli	sap	HT
Narrow leaf cotton bush, swan plant	Gomphocarpus fruticosus	pods	L-M T
Nerine	Nerine spp	sap	L-M T
Nettle, stinging nettle	Urtica spp	hairs on leaves	L-M T
Nicotiana	Nicotiana tabacum	all	E L-M
Oleander (see also yellow oleander)	Nerium oleander	all	E H S
Ornamental chilli – see Jerusalem cherry			
Ornithogalum – see chincherinchee			
Pampas grass	Cortaderia selloana	leaves	HT
Paterson's curse	Echium plantagineum	all	E L-M S T
Peace lily, spathiphyllum	Spathiphyllum spp	all	E L-M T



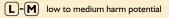
Naked lady



Nettle



Oleander



M-**H** medium to high harm potential

H high harm potential

E irritant when eaten

(T) irritant when touched



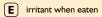




Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Peach	Prunus persica	kernel, flowers, leaves, bark	E L-M
Pencil bush - see naked lady			
Pepper tree	Schinus molle	fruit	E L-M
Philodendron	Philodendron spp	all	E L-M
Pieris	Pieris japonica	leaves, nectar	E H S
Pigeon berry - see duranta			
Plumbago	Plumbago spp	sap	L-M T
Poinsettia	Euphorbia pulcherrima	leaves, sap	L-M T
Potato	Solanum tuberosum	all green parts, especially green skin	EHS
Primrose, primula	Primula spp	all	L-M T
Privet	Ligustrum spp	all, especially berries	E L-M
Rhododendron - see azalea			
Rhubarb	Rheum rhaponticum	leaves	E L-M
Rhus, scarlet rhus	Rhus spp	all	HT
Robinia - see black locust			

M-**H** medium to high harm potential





Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Rudbeckia	Rudbeckia hirta	all	L-M T
Rue	Ruta graveolens	all	E L-M T
Scarlet rhus - see rhus			
Shasta daisy - see marguerite			
Snake's head fritillary - see fritillaria			
Spathiphyllum - see peace lily			
Spindle tree - see euonymus			
Spurge - see euphorbia			
Stinging nettle - see nettle			
Swan plant - see narrow leaf cotton bush			
Swiss cheese plant - see fruit salad plant			
Tansy	Tanacetum vulgare	leaves, flowers	E L-M
Taro - see elephant's ear			
Toadstools	Amanita spp and many other genera	all	E H
Tomato	Lycopersicon esculentum	all green parts	EHS



Robinia

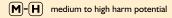


Spurge



Swan plant

lacksquare low to medium harm potential



H high harm potential

E irritant when eaten

(T) irritant when touched



Tree of heaven



Virginia creeper

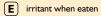


Wisteria

Common name/s	Botanical name	Harmful parts	Rating
Travellers' joy - see clematis			
Tree of heaven	Ailanthus altissima	sap	L-M T
Tung-oil tree	Vernicia fordii	all, especially seeds	EHS
Virginia creeper	Parthenocissus quinquefolia	fruit, leaves	E L-M
Waxflower - see hoya			
White cedar - see cape lilac			
Wintersweet - see bushman's poison			
Wisteria	Wisteria spp	seeds, pods	E H S
Wormwood	Artemisia spp	all	E M-H T S
Yellow jasmine - see false jasmine			
Yellow oleander (see also oleander)	Cascabela thevetia	all, especially seed in kernel	EHS
Yesterday, today and tomorrow	Brunsfelsia spp	seeds	E L-M S
Yew	Taxus baccata	seeds, leaves	EHS
Zamia	Macrozamia spp	seeds, leaves	E L-M S

M-**H** medium to high harm potential





Further reading Shepherd, RCH (2004). Pretty but poisonous, RG and FJ Richardson, Melbourne, 202pp. Photographs courtesy of R.G. and FJ. Richardson, from the book 'Pretty but Poisonous. Plants Poisonous to People - An Illustrated Guide for Australia' by R.C.H. Shepherd which is available from R.G. and FJ. Richardson, PO Box 42, Meredith, Victoria 3333. Tel/Fax: (03) 5286 I 533 Web: www.weedinfo.com.au



