

# Illinois Poisonous Plants



nightshade *Solanum spp.*  
© 2002 Steven J. Baskauf



jimsonweed *Datura spp.*  
© 2002 Steven J. Baskauf



poison hemlock *Conium maculatum*  
© 2003 Steven J. Baskauf



poison ivy *Toxicodendron radicans*  
© 2008 Adele Hodde, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



pokeweed *Phytolacca americana*  
© 2008 Michael Haddock



azalea, vegetation only



azalea, in bloom  
azalea *Rhododendron spp.*

Vegetation only photo © 2008 Adele Hodde, Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
In bloom photo © 2008 Richard Day/Daybreak Imagery



rhododendron *Rhododendron spp.*  
© 2008 Stefan Bloodworth, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



delphinium or larkspur *Delphinium spp.*  
© 2008 Adele Hodde, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*  
© Mark W. Skinner © USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database



lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*  
© Dr. John Meade, Weed Scientist Emeritus, Rutgers Cooperative Extension



morning-glory *Ipomoea spp.*  
© 2008 Rob Curtis, The Early Birder



Canada yew *Taxus canadensis*  
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philodendron *Philodendron spp.*  
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dieffenbachia *Dieffenbachia spp.*  
© 2008 Adele Hodde, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



mother-in-law's tongue or snake plant *Sansevieria spp.*  
© 2008 Adele Hodde, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



American holly *Ilex opaca*  
© 2008 Rob Curtis, The Early Birder

The species shown on this poster are poisonous plants commonly found in Illinois. They were selected for inclusion by staff at the Illinois Poison Center as representatives of plants most frequently involved in poisoning incidents in our state. There are many other poisonous plants growing naturally in Illinois and cultivated in homes and gardens. Caution should be used when selecting plants for the home or garden. Although toxicity varies in poisonous plants, children, people with developmental disabilities and pets are at risk of eating large amounts of the plant(s). By ingesting more of the plant(s), the level of toxicity may be increased. Always wash your hands thoroughly after touching any of these plants, fresh or dried.

For more information and an expanded list of toxic plants, visit  
[www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org](http://www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org).

For free poison prevention education training and materials, go to  
[www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org/outreach](http://www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org/outreach).

If you have questions and/or need treatment advice, contact the  
**Illinois Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.**

The Illinois Poison Center encourages people to learn the names of plants in and around their home. Label each plant with the correct common and botanical names. Consult a local greenhouse, plant nursery or florist to identify unknown plants. This information is critical in an emergency when it can be difficult to identify plants from a verbal description given over the telephone. Providing the correct plant name can help ensure that accurate treatment advice is dispensed quickly.

## Species List

### Toxic Wild Plants

jimsonweed *Datura spp.*  
nightshade *Solanum spp.*  
poison hemlock *Conium maculatum*  
poison ivy *Toxicodendron radicans*  
pokeweed *Phytolacca americana*

### Toxic Garden/Landscaping Plants

azalea *Rhododendron spp.*  
Canada yew *Taxus canadensis*  
delphinium or larkspur *Delphinium spp.*  
foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*  
lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*  
morning-glory *Ipomoea spp.*  
rhododendron *Rhododendron spp.*

### Toxic House and Holiday Plants

American holly *Ilex opaca*  
dieffenbachia *Dieffenbachia spp.*  
mother-in-law's tongue  
or snake plant *Sansevieria spp.*  
philodendron *Philodendron spp.*

## This poster was made possible by:



Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Education  
Division of Natural Heritage



Illinois Poison Center



# Poisonous Plants

Poisons are substances that may cause illness or death. Poisons can be chemicals present in nature, such as certain chemical elements or compounds. They can also be produced by living things. Poison that is injected by animals through bites or stings is known as venom.

Many plants are poisonous to humans and other organisms. These plants can be found growing wild or cultivated in homes and gardens. Poisonous plants are also often used in holiday decorations. The poisons in plants may be on the surface or as chemicals within the tissues. Some parts of a plant may be more toxic than other parts, and some poisonous plants may be more dangerous during specific seasons. Toxicity may vary within individual plants of the same species, too.

Poisons can affect people through contact with skin or eyes, through ingestion by eating and through inhalation. Not all people may react the same way to the same poison. If you suspect that someone has come into contact with a dangerous plant, immediately call the

**ILLINOIS POISON CENTER**  
at  
**1-800-222-1222.**

# Illinois Poisonous Plants

## Species Descriptions

There are far too many poisonous plants in Illinois to depict on this poster. The species described below and illustrated on the front of the poster were selected by the Illinois Poison Center because they are among the plants most commonly involved in poisoning incidents in our state.

### Toxic Wild Plants

#### jimsonweed *Datura spp.*

**Description:** Two species of this plant grow wild in Illinois, usually only in recently disturbed areas. The white or pale-purple flowers are trumpet-shaped and four to six inches long. Leaves are large and coarsely toothed. Each seed pod is about the same size as a walnut and covered with spines. The seed pod contains dozens of black seeds.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of this plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** atropine, hyoscyamine and scopolamine alkaloids

**Symptoms:** hot, dry and flushed skin, hallucinations, pupil dilation, agitation or drowsiness, fever, seizures, elevated blood pressure and heart rate

#### nightshade *Solanum spp.*

**Description:** Ten species of this plant group grow wild in Illinois. They often climb or grow as a vine. Flowers are in clusters. Each flower has five petals that may be purple, yellow or white. The center flower structures form a beak that points away from the flower. Prickles are present on some species. Much variation exists between the species.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts are poisonous, but berries are most commonly ingested.

**Toxin:** solanine

**Symptoms:** nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, drowsiness, increased salivation and muscle cramping

#### poison hemlock *Conium maculatum*

**Description:** Poison hemlock grows along streams and ditches throughout Illinois. It may reach four to 10 feet in height. The hollow, branched, purple-spotted stems support fern-like leaves. The plant's single white taproot resembles a carrot or parsnip. Small white flowers develop in clusters four to six inches wide.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of this plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** coniine

**Symptoms:** nausea, vomiting, confusion and rapid heart rate progress to drowsiness, muscle paralysis, decreased breathing and possibly death

#### poison ivy *Toxicodendron radicans*

**Description:** Each leaf has three parts (leaflets). Leaves are often glossy and may show bumps or other deformities. The flowers are green-white and produce white berries. Poison ivy grows as a vine, a short plant along the ground or a short, erect form.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** The poisonous oil covers all parts of the plant, including the roots. Oil may be spread from dead poison ivy plants, too, as well as carried in smoke when the plants are burned, and can be picked up from other objects that touch the plant, such as fur of a pet.

**Toxin:** urushiol

**Symptoms:** blistering, redness, itching, rash

#### pokeweed *Phytolacca americana*

**Description:** Pokeweed, also known as ink berry, poke Sally, poke Sallet or pokeberry, grows in woods, fields and disturbed areas throughout Illinois. It is an herbaceous plant that may grow to a height of 10 feet. The red-purple stem, large smooth leaves and long flower stalks that often develop paired with the leaves are distinctive traits. Flowers are green-white and give rise to dark purple, plump berries. Crushed berries can stain skin and clothing.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of the plant can contribute to poisoning.

**Toxin:** saponins

**Symptoms:** headache, vomiting, sore throat/oral irritation, abdominal pain, foamy diarrhea, fever, agitation, cough, drowsiness, blurred vision, irregular heart beat

### Toxic Garden/Landscaping Plants

#### azalea and rhododendron *Rhododendron spp.*

**Description:** These woody shrubs are closely related and most noticeable for their clusters of showy flowers in spring. There are two native species in Illinois and thousands of cultivated varieties. Some varieties have evergreen leaves while others are deciduous (lose leaves in the fall of the year). Evergreen varieties tend to have smaller leaves than deciduous ones. Flowers appear in spring for one to two weeks, and some azalea varieties bloom again in fall. Azalea flowers may all be the same color on one plant or may be varied. Rhododendrons are similar in appearance to azaleas, but the flower structure is different. An azalea will have five or six stamens (structures with pollen) in each flower, but a rhododendron will have 10 stamens per flower.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of these plants are poisonous.

**Toxin:** grayanotoxin

**Symptoms:** burning, tingling or numbness to the mouth, nausea, vomiting, slow heart rate, low blood pressure, coma, seizures

#### Canada yew *Taxus canadensis*

**Description:** This compact evergreen shrub has needle-shaped leaves and is often planted around the foundation of buildings. Leaves are arranged in a spiral around the stem. Its red berries are produced only on female plants, and each berry has a large pit inside. Canada yew does grow wild in northern Illinois but is rarely encountered.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** The bark, needles and seed pit are poisonous.

**Toxin:** taxine

**Symptoms:** nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dizziness and dilated pupils; seizures, cardiac rhythm disturbances and death may follow

**A special note on evergreens:** The yew is very poisonous. Other evergreens, such as balsams, cedars, firs, junipers and pines, contain toxic oils. However, poisoning seldom results from these plants because large amounts of the toxin are not normally consumed.

#### delphinium or larkspur *Delphinium spp.*

**Description:** The spikes of purple or pink flowers rise above the multi-lobed, toothed leaves. Each flower has a spurlike projection that extends up and back. Two species grow wild in Illinois, and many cultivated varieties are used in landscaping and gardens.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of this plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** alkaloids

**Symptoms:** burning sensation to lips, tongue, fingers and toes that spreads through the body; vomiting, diarrhea, cardiac rhythm disturbances and respiratory paralysis may occur later

#### foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*

**Description:** Foxglove has a two-year life cycle. It grows leaves in a rosette near the ground the first year, then produces flowers before dying in its second year. It blooms in early summer. The flowering stalk may be three to six feet tall and produces large tube-shaped flowers at the tip. The flowers are spotted on the inside. The downy leaves are gray-green with small teeth along the edges. The fruit is a capsule. Many varieties of this species are grown in gardens. A wide range of flower colors is available.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of this plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** cardiac glycosides similar to digitoxin

**Symptoms:** nausea and vomiting, drowsiness, slow heart rate, low blood pressure, cardiac rhythm disturbances

#### lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*

**Description:** Lily-of-the-valley is a short, herbaceous plant that grows in tightly packed colonies. Leaves develop at the base of the plant. When blooming in spring, each flower stalk has five to 15 white, bell-shaped flowers that hang downward and are fragrant. The fruit is an orange-red berry.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of the plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** cardiac glycosides

**Symptoms:** nausea and vomiting, drowsiness, slow heart rate, low blood pressure, cardiac rhythm disturbances

#### morning-glory *Ipomoea spp.*

**Description:** Morning-glories are herbaceous vines that may grow along the ground or on other structures, such as trellises, buildings or other plants. Leaf shape in these species varies greatly. Cultivated species often have heart-shaped leaves. The flowers are bell-shaped and can be seen in a variety of colors (red, white, pink, purple or blue). Each flower typically only lasts for one morning. Vines may be 10 to 20 feet long. Six species grow in the wild in Illinois, but many cultivated varieties are also planted.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** Morning-glory seeds are poisonous.

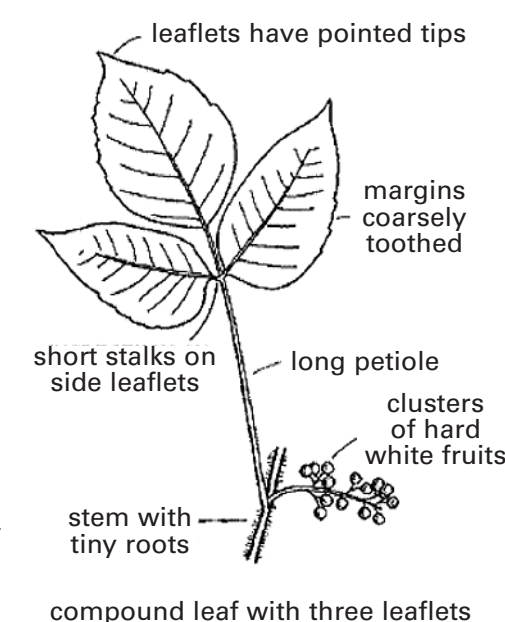
**Toxin:** ergot alkaloids

**Symptoms:** hallucinations, dilated pupils, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, drowsiness, erratic behavior

# Poison Ivy

## poison ivy *Toxicodendron radicans*

"Leaflets three, let it be" is good advice. While not every leaf with three leaflets is from a poison ivy plant, all poison ivy leaves do have three leaflets. The central leaflet in each poison ivy leaf is on a longer stalk than the other two leaflets. The leaves are arranged alternately along the stem. Leaves are often shiny and may have bumps. Poison ivy grows in disturbed areas, woods and on the banks of streams and ponds. It is adaptable, though, and can be found statewide in most habitats, including urban areas. It grows as a vine, short erect plant or shrub. Green-white flowers are produced in a cluster at the base of the leaf. Mature flowers produce white berries that are often eaten by birds. Knowing how to identify this plant can help you to avoid it.



### Toxic House and Holiday Plants

#### American holly *Ilex opaca*

**Description:** The evergreen American holly tree usually grows from 10 to 40 feet in height. Its glossy, stiff leaves are two to four inches long and have multiple points on the edges. Tiny white flowers are produced in clusters in May and June, and red (sometimes yellow) berries develop from them. Most people come in contact with American holly through holiday decorations.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** The leaves and berries are poisonous.

**Toxin:** No specific toxin has been determined as the primary cause of symptoms, however, saponins are largely responsible for the gastrointestinal effects.

**Symptoms:** vomiting, diarrhea and mild drowsiness

#### dieffenbachia *Dieffenbachia spp.*

**Description:** Dieffenbachia plants, also known as dumb cane, are native to tropical areas. The stem has an appearance like that of cane, and ingesting the toxin can cause vocal cord paralysis, thus the "dumb cane" common name. These plants have large leaves, up to 20 inches in length, and may reach four feet in height. Leaves are dark green to yellow green with white- or cream-colored markings.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of the plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** calcium oxalate

**Symptoms:** burning in the mouth and throat

#### mother-in-law's tongue or snake plant *Sansevieria spp.*

**Description:** The rigid, upright leaves with sharp edges are characteristic of this plant. Leaves are green with dark green markings. Some species have yellow striping or edges on the leaves.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of the plant are poisonous.

**Toxin:** calcium oxalate

**Symptoms:** vomiting or nausea; burning in the mouth and throat

#### philodendron *Philodendron spp.*

**Description:** Philodendrons are fast-growing plants with leathery, glossy leaves. Many species grow as vines, but others are upright. Leaf shape and color vary greatly. Leaf size ranges from three inches to three feet.

**Poisonous parts of the plant:** All parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested.

**Toxin:** calcium oxalate

**Symptoms:** burning in the mouth and throat

## Agency Resources

Much more information regarding poisonous plants is available to educators. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources offers many publications that help teachers and students learn what plants are present in the state and how to identify plant species. These publications can be accessed through the order form at <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/publications>. The Illinois Poison Center provides poison prevention education training and materials as well as treatment advice.

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources**  
Division of Education  
One Natural Resources Way  
Springfield, IL 62702  
217-524-4126  
<http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/education>  
[dnr.teachkids@illinois.gov](mailto:dnr.teachkids@illinois.gov)

**Illinois Poison Center**  
222 South Riverside Plaza  
19th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60606  
312-906-6136  
1-800-222-1222  
<http://www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org>

### Illinois Learning Standards

This poster may be used to help teachers meet the following Illinois Learning Standards.

physical development and health: 22.A.1c; 22.C.1; 22.A.2b; 22.A.2c; 22.C.2

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