

# Plant poisoning on the upswing

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Pretty plants can be pretty dangerous to young children. That's the warning from doctors at the Poison Control Center and botanists at the University of Michigan.

"Plant poisoning is very common," said Dr. Regine Aranow, director of the Poison Control Center, which is based in Children's Hospital in Detroit. "In the fall, there are just tons of little kids running around eating little red berries. You just have to teach little kids that they don't eat every red berry on every bush," she said.

Compounding the danger is the growing interest in wild edible plants. The fad has led to an increase in plant poisonings, said Sue Norton of Plymouth, who will be heading a three-day seminar in June on wild poisonous plants at Ann Arbor's Matthaei Botanical Gardens.

MORE THAN 1,500 cases of plant poisoning were reported to the Poison Control Center last year. That figure, Dr. Aranow said, does not include cases of mushroom poisoning because mushrooms are fungi.

The vast majority of reported cases involve children aged 10 and younger.

Toddlers are especially susceptible, Dr. Aranow said, because they are curious and many of the plants are easily within their reach.

MANY POISONOUS plants are common to backyard gardens, she said. Bushes that produce appealing, abundant—but poisonous—red berries are familiar front yard decorations.

Red berries, involved in a large proportion of reported plant poisonings, is an all-inclusive term. There is a large number of red-berried producing plants and bushes, Dr. Aranow noted off 10 varieties in less than half a minute.

Neither are house plants necessarily safe. Some of the leaves sprouting in your terrarium and sprawling across

your coffee table could make a curious child sick.

There are certain types of philodendron and dieffenbachia—both common house plants—which could be especially disconcerting to small children who decide to experiment with their taste buds.

"It's like chewing fiberglass," Dr. Aranow said. "The chemicals in the leaves and stalk cause swelling in the mucus membrane of the throat, making breathing painful and difficult," she explained.

"SOME OF THE MOST common (poisonous plants) are the plants that the parks and recreation departments are planting around the cities," Dr. Aranow said.

Evergreens, which also produce one type of the infamous "red berry," are doubly dangerous. "The needles are just as toxic," she said. "They can make your heart stop functioning correctly."

"They're especially dangerous because they're there all year around."

TODDLERS, HOWEVER, are not the only tasters the doctors worry about.

"You've got all these people on health food kicks," Dr. Aranow said. "People are encouraged to go stalking the wild looking for food."

The aspiring forager for natural nutrition may be looking for nuts, berries, edible roots and herbs, but may come back with more trouble than anticipated.

Nightshade and hemlock, both powerful poisons, can be found around the metropolitan-Detroit area, Dr. Aranow said.

OTHER POWERFUL poisons, she said, could innocently be bought from local nurseries and garden shops. Castorbean plants, whose berries pro-

duce a powerful toxin, have been sold at some local shops, Dr. Aranow said.

"You don't even have to eat the berry," she said, "just sucking on them or their juice is enough to make you very sick."

STOMACHACHES, THE typical symptom of plant poisonings, are not that uncommon among children. Dr. Aranow advises parents to find out exactly what their children may have feasted upon.

"Have the child take you back to the bush or the plant. If they've had just one berry it's highly unlikely that it's going to cause serious problems," she said.

"But remember," she added, "looks may be deceiving. What may look like a berry on a bush may be a berry on a vine growing in a bush."

"It's important to be exact. Is the berry hard or soft? Is it on a bush or a tree? Was it on the ground? Does it have spines?" she asked.

While there are very few antidotes for plant poisoning, all the information is necessary in determining the toxin.

DR. ARANOW is quick to point out that very few plant poisonings actually require hospitalization.

Sometimes emergency room doctors have to wait for other symptoms to develop. And with few serums available, doctors often must let children ride out their stomachaches.

In severe cases, however, vomiting must be induced. For that reason, Dr. Aranow advises mothers keep a one ounce bottle of syrup of ipecac available for each child under the age of five.

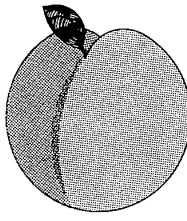
Parents can obtain a poison prevention kit, which includes the pamphlet "A New Look at Poisonous Plants," by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Poison Control Center at Children's Hospital, 3901 Beaubien Boulevard, Detroit 48201.



The fruits of some plants are both inviting and healthy. Others are just inviting.

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## Street bonds cover 10 projects

The Board of Oakland County Road Commissioners has accepted the low bid of Manley, Bennett, McDonald & Co. of Detroit for \$2.5 million worth of bonds to finance special assessment subdivision street improvements.

John R. Gnuu Jr., chairman of the road commission, said the winning bid calls for an effective interest rate of 5.376 per cent and will cost \$770,154 over the 10-year life of the bonds.

"The board accepted the only qualified bid submitted by the deadline," said Gnuu. "A second bid was received from Bach, Hasey, Stuart & Shields, Inc. in time and for a lower effective interest rate (5.2535 or \$755,062), but the bidder added a spe-

cial condition unacceptable to the board.

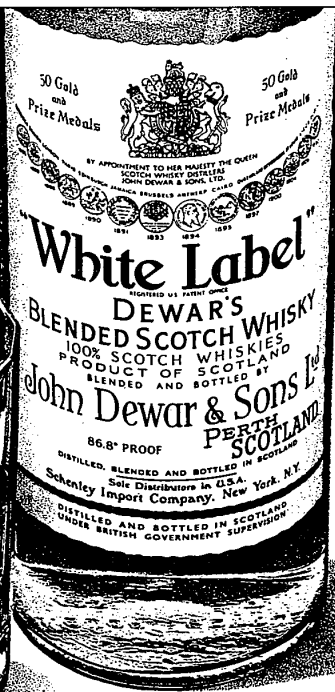
"We have 10 special assessment paving projects confirmed, for which the special assessments will total \$968,000. Ten other subdivisions have initiated special assessment procedures, which would have assessments totalling \$823,000.

"And we have been notified of six more projects with potential assessments of \$572,000. These are expected to be under construction in the next three years, and we can reasonably expect that another \$132,000 worth of projects will be added in that time," said Gnuu.



The sporting thing this summer. The sport coat: it can be as dressy as a business suit (the classic blue blazer, the luxurious silk coat) or it can be completely casual (the colorful plaid, the sunny color) or anything in between. There just isn't any rule anymore, because the sport coat opens interesting avenues of self-expression. We have a wonderfully wide spectrum of sport coats this spring, and here are two quite different examples. Left: cotton madras jacket tailored by Daks in the English manner, at \$135. And right: an Italian import in a silky blend at \$145. There are a great many more.

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