

# Kids, nature lovers fall prey to poison plants

By MICHAEL MATUSEWSKI  
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 a 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. Bashes 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-berry producing plants and bushes. Dr. Aranow reeled 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 discomforting 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 mucous 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 produce 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.

"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.

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.

## Anti-war group sees to challenge of '70s

By MARY LOU CALLAWAY

"Sometimes saving the world gets down to counting cookies and tablecloths."

That's what Gerry McNabb occupied herself with recently while preparing a wine and cheese reception for a speaker at one of the Oakland County Peace and National Priorities Center's meetings.

McNabb, the executive secretary of the nonmembership organization in West Bloomfield, has a volunteer staff of 24 persons. But for her it's almost a full-time job from her Orchard Lake home.

Founded by a small group of persons who opposed the Vietnam War in 1971, the Peace Center now mails more than 800 newsletters regularly from its offices on Middlebelt Road, south of Maple at the Church of Our Saviour.

"Originally, it was formed to express a need to share information and speakers," Ms. McNabb said. "We grew from those who were brought to their first realization of the horrors of the war. We thought we were temporary, she said.

"TODAY, THE PEACE issue means survival. It ties in with the environmental issue. It impacts on economic and employment issues. We find more jobs come out of filling human needs than from the military."

The group perceives itself as a service and education movement in line with people's interests. Newsletters are sent to 800 addresses whenever it can scrape up enough money to cover postage.

It includes a calendar of peace related events, legislation alerts such as the recent Panama Canal debates. They also tackle problems in the Middle East, Africa and the sale of arms anywhere in the world.

Every congressional election year, a candidate's questionnaire is compiled. Answers from U.S. Senate and House candidates are supplied in newsletters and to the press.

It covers the four congressional districts in Oakland County. The organization does receive the backing of religious organizations simply because it is dependent on donations to cover expenses.

Its rent is donated by the church and other local support comes from Temple Kol Ami in West Bloomfield, the Farmington Presbyterian Church, Birmingham Unitarian Church, St. Hugo in the Hills Catholic Church and the Detroit Conference of Methodists.

The group is endorsed by National Clergy and Laity Concerned, a coalition of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish congregations. ON A SHOESTRING budget, which has never exceeded \$5,000 per year, Ms. McNabb is the only person minimally reimbursed for expenses and time. An advisory board serves as volunteers.

When not in the West Bloomfield office, Ms. McNabb presents programs to schools and churches.

Current slide films are "Transfer," which describes the need for changing priorities from military to "human needs"; "Sharing Global Resources," showing how human resources with third world countries are affected by American foreign policy, and "The Last Slide Show," demonstrating the need for disarmament.

The center's telephone number is 626-6396.

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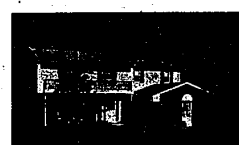
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