

Poisonous plants of Northwest Florida lecture

When most people hear “poisonous plant” they think of plants that can do serious damage or possibly cause death. They become fearful and want to remove any plant labeled as “poisonous.” However, the term poisonous does not necessarily mean that a plant is fatal. There are varying degrees of toxicity. Some plants may be only mildly toxic, resulting in a skin irritation if touched or a stomach ache if ingested.

Sometimes there are variables with individuals’ sensitivity to a particular plant. Some people experience an allergic reaction to poison ivy while others may not. A person’s age, weight and health status may determine how severe poisoning symptoms may be when touching or ingesting a poisonous plant.

Most people are surprised to learn just how many of our common plants, such as azaleas, hydrangeas, boxwood and English ivy, have poisonous properties. It is worth your time to become familiar with some of the more common landscape plants known to have poisonous properties. It’s not that we necessarily need to eliminate or discourage the use of these plants in our landscapes. But we do need to be aware of the potential hazards of some of these plants, particularly when they are used in landscapes frequented by young children and pets. As the saying goes “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

An example is poison ivy, which is fairly common in our area. As a result you’d do well to learn to identify and control it. You’ve probably heard “leaves of three, leave it be” since childhood. This old saying refers to a couple of poisonous plants frequently found in Florida - poison ivy and poison oak. Every year 10 to 50 million Americans develop severe skin dermatitis after contact with these poisonous plants. Do you know how to identify these plants?

Identifying poisonous plants is the first step in avoiding allergic reactions. Parents should teach their children how to recognize and avoid these plants in the wild. The saying “leaves of three, leave it be” is a good rule of thumb. Poison ivy and poison oak have leaves with three leaflets.

You may be interested in attending a lecture on this topic that I’m providing at the Robert L. F. Sikes Public Library in Crestview. The title of my talk is Common Poisonous Plants of Northwest Florida. The lecture will take place 10:30 – 11:30 Tuesday morning, March 3. There is no cost to attend. The library is located at 1445 Commerce Drive behind the Crestview Post Office. For more information, call the library at 682-4432.

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