

Poisonous Plants and Plant Safety

Ann I. King and Elise Stone

Few publications are available to the California public, to retail nurserymen, and to landscape and health professionals on poisonous plants and plant toxicity. The publication, *Your Guide for Plant Safety*, a brochure by the San Francisco Bay Area Regional Poison Control Center, was in dire need of revision and expansion. UC Cooperative Extension had no current publications on ornamental plants which are poisonous to humans.

In the Bay Area alone, the San Francisco Bay Area Regional Poison Control Center receives approximately 3,000 telephone calls annually related to possible plant poisonings.

In 1997, California's numerous poison control centers centralized to form a single California Poison Control System to serve the entire state. They needed a new poisonous plant publication that reflected their new statewide agency, along with current information such as the new statewide telephone number for the Poison Control Center.

As a collaborative project, Elise Stone of the California Poison Control System and I requested funding from the Elvenia J. Slosson Endowment Fund to create the publication, *Know Your Plants... Safe or Poisonous?*

Geared for the average reader, the publication was designed to address:

- general plant safety such as information on herbal medicines, mushrooms, and preventing poisoning exposures
- toxic ornamental plants (and their toxicity class) found in many California gardens and homes
- nontoxic, "safe" ornamental plants which are appropriate for home gardens and indoor use

Since its completion in 1997, the publication *Know Your Plants... Safe or Poisonous?* has been distributed to all of the UC Cooperative Extension county offices, and to all Master Gardener programs in California. Through Master Gardener publicity, the publication has been advertised in many gardening newsletters and community publications. This has generated additional requests for the publication. Additionally, the California Poison Control System distributes the publication and uses it in its educational programs.

Know Your Plants... Safe or Poisonous? will soon



The new brochure is distributed by the California Poison Control System.

be distributed to retail nurserymen through the California Association of Nurserymen, to arboretum and botanical garden docent programs, and to pediatric health care and child care agencies in California. We anticipate even broader distribution to the public as a result of this outreach.

Because only a limited number of plants could be put on the printed publication (due to space limitations), a lengthier list is being developed for a web site and should be completed by summer, 1998. This will be useful to gardeners, nurserymen, and plant professionals who need a more extensive list of toxic and nontoxic ornamental plants.

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