

## Are Your Houseplants Safe?

There is nothing more attractive and cheerful than a room filled with healthy green houseplants. They offer aesthetics to the interior of our homes, improve indoor air quality, and often provide emotional satisfaction to the caregiver in getting the plant to bloom or produce new growth. However, did you know that plant exposures are some of the most frequent poisonings reported to poison control centres?

There are more than 700 species of poisonous plants in the United States and many of these can be found around the home. According to the American Association of Poison Control, poisonous plants are among the three most common causes of accidental poisoning in children under 5 years old.

Some or all parts of a plant can be poisonous including the roots, stems, berries or even the nectar and pollen. There are several chemical compounds capable of poisoning that can be found in a variety of plants. Chemicals concentrated in the cells of roots, leaves, bark and seeds serve as the plant's defence against insects and animal attacks. Some of these compounds can be toxic, especially if ingested or touched by humans.

The word "poisonous" generates many kinds of reactions and the majority of them are non life-threatening. Among the key effects of poisonous plants are allergic reactions (caused by spores, pollen, or naturally occurring volatile compounds emitted into the air by plants), skin rash or dermatitis (caused by direct or indirect contact with allergenic or irritant compounds), and internal poisonings or irritations (caused from ingesting plants or plant parts).

There are many houseplants which are perfectly safe to grow and others which appear harmless but are toxic and dangerous. It is important to be as knowledgeable as possible about the plants you have growing in your home.