



The holiday season is upon us. The cookies are baked, the decorations are up, and the holiday plants are blooming with all of their glory. Some of our favorite holiday plants have a potentially dangerous side and can do more than just add color to our homes. Do you think you know which of your holiday plants are safe and which ones are dangerous?

Amaryllis is near the top of the list for forgotten poisonous holiday plants. These plants are one of the more poisonous plants that are brought into the home during the holiday season. Amaryllis are often sold as a large bulb. Once these bulbs are watered, they produce long strap like leaves and a flower stalk containing brightly-colored, trumpet shaped flowers. The toxic chemical that these plants contain is called alkaloid lycorine, which is an irritant to the gastrointestinal tract. The most toxic part of these plants is the bulb. The other parts of the plants can also be toxic if they are eaten in large quantities.

Kissing under the mistletoe sounds like an innocent- enough holiday ritual. Try researching the many meanings of this holiday tradition just for fun. Real mistletoe is a common holiday plants that is sold dried in small packages to be hung in homes. The plant has thick, leathery, green leaves and white berries. The plant itself is a parasite-like plant that feeds off of other trees. With some species, eating a few of the berries would produce mild gastroenteritis, acute diarrhea and vomiting. All parts of the plant are considered to be toxic. Want to rethink kissing under a poisonous, parasitic plant?

Another holiday plant gets a bad reputation for being extremely poisonous, the poinsettia. According to research, they are not considered poisonous. According to the POISINDEX, the primary resource used by most poison control centers, a 50 pound child would have to eat more than 1.25 pounds of colored poinsettia bracts, about 500 to 600, to exceed the experimental dose. There would probably be some stomach upset or vomiting if a few bracts were eaten, but it is not considered toxic. The milky sap from the poinsettia can be a skin irritant and can cause a rash in people who are sensitive.

Looking for some completely safe holiday plants? The Christmas cactus and kalanchoe are two plants that are deemed non-poisonous by the Nebraska Regional Poison Center. The Christmas cactus has flat, fleshy stems that resemble leaf-like pads which are joined to one another in a chain-like pattern. The flowers are usually held at the tips of the stems or in the 'leaf' axils and are usually pink to red. The kalanchoe has semi-fleshy leaves and flowers that are held in umbels above the leaves. The flowers come in a wide range of colors including yellow, orange, red, and pink to name a few. Another safe holiday plant is the Norfolk Island Pine. This houseplant has evergreen needles and a fun, umbrella like structure. The worst thing that could happen with this one is getting poked by a needle.

Regardless of the plant, resist the urge to eat them and just admire the perfect holiday plant this season.

Upcoming Programs:

Extension Master Gardener Training. Session 1- Tuesday evenings February 7 through March 13, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Session 2- 9:00-12:00 noon and from 1:00-4:00 p.m. March 12, 14, 16, 19, 21, and 23. Program is offered for a fee. Please contact Elizabeth Killinger, 308-385-5088, prior to January 30th with the Master Gardener training session you are interested in attending. More information, updated schedules, and a brochure can be found at <http://hall.unl.edu>. For more information e-mail Elizabeth Killinger at ekillinger2@unl.edu, call 308-385-5088, or visit the Nebraska Extension in Hall County website: hall.unl.edu

Elizabeth Killinger is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.killinger@unl.edu, her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.