



Landscape Design

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## **The Poinsettia Myth and Poisonous Garden Plants**

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It's wintertime and a fitting time to point out that poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are actually NOT poisonous to humans. A long-held myth since a 1919 news story blamed the plant for a child's death, poinsettias have erroneously carried the "poison" mantle. (Eating one can make you ill, however, so "don't try this at home.")

On the flip side, however, there are a number of common garden plants that ARE dangerous to humans (and pets), and it's worth making note of them when you're planning your garden.

I'm a big proponent of teaching children and training pets not to eat the landscape, but if you're concerned, you should know about some of the very commonly used garden plants that are indeed poisonous: azaleas, angel's trumpet, bleeding heart, hellebores, elephant ear, castor oil plant, daffodil bulbs, delphiniums, ivy, holly, larkspur, lilies, oleander, privet, and yew.

Some of these plants are extremely dangerous – like oleander, which can be fatal – and others will bring about merely "digestive upset."

If you have them in your yard, and small children or critters that could eat them, it's worth doing the research about which is which and what steps to take if they should be ingested.

This list is not complete: a more extensive list can be found on [Wikipedia.com](http://Wikipedia.com) under "List of Poisonous Plants"; it even includes mention of apple, cherry, peach, plum, almond and apricot seeds and leaves. In fact, the list could make you reconsider a yard of concrete, Astroturf – and poinsettias! – if you take it too far, so as always, common sense about your own garden needs should prevail. And if you receive a holiday poinsettia, keep it! Plant it in your yard after the danger of frost has passed for a tropical touch of color.