

EASTER LILIES ARE EDIBLE

Jay S. Koths
Professor of Floriculture

Many plants are not edible. Some are poisonous and others cause allergic skin reactions. Most of the plants we encounter are not dangerous especially the flowering pot plants which you enjoy in your office and homes. Unfortunately, Easter lilies were erroneously reported as poisonous in the March issue of The State Scene, a monthly newspaper for state employees. They are not hazardous to your health!

No species in the genus *Lilium* has been found to be poisonous. Quite the contrary, many lilies are used as food around the world. The Dictionary of Economic Plants lists 16 species used as food. Bulbs are commonly consumed while the young leaves of *Lilium cordifolium* are eaten as a vegetable in Japan and flowers of *L. Sargentia* are consumed in China. Bulbs of *L. Martagon* are often dried in the sun and eaten with reindeer's milk by Cossacks along the Volga.

The poinsettia was also erroneously reported to be poisonous many years ago and the myth has persisted. But researchers in Ohio force fed rats through a feeding tube (they had to force feed since poinsettias taste terrible) up to a rate equivalent to a 140 pound person eating seven pounds. All 160 rats remained healthy. But the poinsettia is not lily white. A very few people are sensitive to the milky sap of the poinsettia.

Many plants cause allergic reactions to someone. Poison ivy affects most of us. By comparison, narcissus, some primroses and even philodendrons will cause a rash on the skin of a few people. Remember that some are allergic to cats, dust, pollen, grapes or strawberries.

Plants are frequently reported as possible poisons to poison control centers since children so often chew on them. The majority of these calls simply request information such

as when a two year old bites a begonia. Most of these incidents are harmless. The National Clearinghouse for Poison Control Centers reports that only 5% of the reported possible poisoning incidents involving plants and mushrooms showed any toxicity. They also report that only 8% of the inquiries involve plants so that only 4 calls per 1000 involve possible plant toxicity. The Easter lily should never be involved. However, please don't eat the lilies.

Connecticut's Poison Control Center is located at the UConn Health Center. If you do suspect poisoning from plants or anything else, don't hesitate. Call 1-674-3456 for help.