

## POINSETTIAS ARE *NOT* POISONOUS

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The poinsettia was found guilty without a trial. Old wives' tales--hearsay evidences--ignorance--plea bargaining--gave it a reputation of being poisonous.

Until recently, the symbol of Christmas was found in many lists of poisonous plants. But none of the references could be substantiated. Even the most serious citation was found to be based on hearsay evidence.

At last the poinsettia has been given a fair trial and found not guilty. Two researchers at Ohio State University fed poinsettias to rats. They prepared homogenates of leaves (upper and lower), red bracts and even the small yellow flowers. This homogenate was force fed to the rats through a feeding tube since poinsettias taste terrible.

This diet was not just a taste to see what would happen. The rats were fed from one to five percent of their body weight. This is equivalent to a 140 lb. person choking down 7 lbs. of poinsettia. Most people couldn't eat half that much steak.

Nothing detrimental occurred. There were no signs of toxicity or apparent ill effects. All 160 rats were healthy.

The researchers went on to analyze the leaves, bracts, stem and even the latex in the milky sap. They found no chemicals commonly considered toxic. This research was published by Robert P. Stone and W. J. Collins in *Toxicon* 9:301-302 (1971). These gentlemen have conducted a fair trial for the poinsettia, at last, and found it not guilty.

The poinsettia is not completely lily white. A large proportion of human beings are allergic to something. A few people are sensitive to the milky sap of the poinsettia. This is a skin irritation. While less severe and far less common than poison ivy, it is similar in that no reaction occurs when eaten. The rash is principally a nuisance.

#### OIL USE SUMMARY

In a survey of greenhouse ranges in western Connecticut covering 216,000 sq. ft., an oil consumption (1972-73) of 485,000 gallons was computed to give an average of 2.25 gals./sq. ft. The average temperature of these greenhouses is gestimated to be about 57°F. Some, for bedding plants, were heated only in late winter and spring. This indicates that many greenhouses are not efficiently heated. Perhaps you should review the suggestions by Mr. Bartok in the Connecticut Greenhouse Newsletters, No. 55 and this issue, on ways to increase greenhouse heating efficiency. J.J.M.