

UK Poisonous Plants

The UK has several common wild plants that can be dangerous or fatal if ingested or touched.
Can you identify those shown below?

			
Spring Meadow Saffron	Foxglove (<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>)	Laurel Hedging Plant	Snowdrop
			
Holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>)	Hemlock Water Dropwort	Mistletoe	Lily of the Valley
			
Lords & Ladies Cuckoo Pint (<i>Arum maculatum</i>)	Larkspur	Yew (<i>Taxus baccata</i>)	Poison Hemlock
			
Hydrangea	Oleander (<i>Nerium oleander</i>)	Rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron</i>)	Spindle (<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>)
			
Laburnum (<i>Laburnum anagyroides</i>)	Deadly Nightshade (<i>Atropa belladonna</i>)	Giant Hogweed	Monkshood or Wolfsbane (<i>Aconitum napellus</i>)

Spring Meadow Saffron

This low-growing perennial has purple-pink, stemless, open, funnel-shaped flowers and linear leaves that keep growing after the flowers fade. All parts are toxic if eaten and can cause kidney damage, dehydration and even death from respiratory failure.

Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*): Contains cardiac glycosides that disrupt heart function and cause severe digestive distress.

Laurel Hedging Plant: One of the most common plants used to beautify English gardens across the country turns deadly when cut, releasing cyanide that starves the nervous system of oxygen.

Snowdrop: Snowdrops contain two key alkaloids, lycorine and galantamine, both also found in daffodils. Though not potent enough to kill, ingesting snowdrop or daffodil bulbs can lead to diarrhoea and vomiting.

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*): Most people are familiar with holly, though few stop to think about the toxicity of its berries. Berries only form on the female tree. Eating a few berries is likely to give children a serious stomach upset, but eating more than twenty can be fatal.

Hemlock Water Dropwort: Often called Britain's most dangerous plant. It grows near water, looks like celery or parsnip, and contains a powerful neurotoxin that causes violent convulsions and respiratory failure. Dead man's fingers or dead tongue.

Mistletoe: All parts of mistletoe are poisonous, but especially the berries. Ingestion can cause severe digestive problems, which have even led to death in humans and can also be particularly concerning for pets.

Lily of the Valley: Spreads via aggressive roots and holds dangerous heart-affecting toxins.

Lords & Ladies/Cuckoo Pint (*Arum maculatum*): Calcium oxalate raphides (needle-like crystals)

Produces bright red berries in autumn. Chewing any part of the plant causes severe burning, tongue and throat swelling, and respiratory distress.

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Larkspur: These flowers may be beautiful, but they are not edible. The entire plant contains toxic alkaloids, though the young leaves and mature seeds are the most dangerous.

Yew (*Taxus baccata*): An evergreen tree common in churchyards. While the red fleshy part (aril) of the berry is technically non-toxic, the seed inside and the needle-like leaves are highly toxic and can cause sudden heart failure.

Poison Hemlock: Contains coniine, causing progressive nervous system paralysis and suffocation.

Hydrangea: Another common garden plant that can be deadly. The poison is a cyanogenic glycoside which causes a drop in blood pressure and potentially convulsions and death.

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*): *Nerium oleander* can be extremely dangerous, as it can seriously harm and even kill with just a single leaf. The whole plant is poisonous, including the nectar and sap.

Rhododendron (*Rhododendron*): A very common woody garden and woodland shrub. Ingestion of leaves or nectar causes severe vomiting, low blood pressure, and central nervous system depression.

Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*): This tree or shrub is fairly easy to miss and may go unnoticed on the fringes of your garden until the fruits appear in the autumn. The fruits are bright pinkish-red and eventually burst open to reveal a bright orange seed. Be warned. These eye-catching fruits are also highly toxic.

Laburnum (*Laburnum anagyroides*): Known for cascading yellow hanging flowers in spring. All parts of the tree—especially the seed pods—are poisonous and can cause violent vomiting, convulsions, and serious medical complications.

Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*): Features dull purple bell-like flowers and shiny black berries containing atropine, which can be fatal if ingested.

Giant Hogweed: Features toxic sap that reacts with sunlight to cause severe, painful skin burns, blisters, and long-lasting scars. Native to Central Asia, it was introduced into Britain in 1893 as an ornamental plant, but "escaped from domestication".

Monkshood/ Wolfsbane (*Aconitum napellus*): Contains a potent cardio-toxin and neurotoxin (aconitine) throughout the whole plant, particularly concentrated in the roots.