

A P P E N D I X C

POISONOUS PLANTS

Plants basically poison on contact, ingestion, or by absorption or inhalation. They cause painful skin irritations upon contact, they cause internal poisoning when eaten, and they poison through skin absorption or inhalation in respiratory system. Many edible plants have deadly relatives and look-alikes. Preparation for military missions includes learning to identify those harmful plants in the target area. Positive identification of edible plants will eliminate the danger of accidental poisoning. There is no room for experimentation where plants are concerned, especially in unfamiliar territory.



Castor bean, castor-oil plant, palma Christi

Ricinus communis

Spurge (*Euphorbiaceae*) Family



Description: The castor bean is a semiwoody plant with large, alternate, starlike leaves that grows as a tree in tropical regions and as an annual in temperate regions. Its flowers are very small and inconspicuous. Its fruits grow in clusters at the tops of the plants.

CAUTION

All parts of the plant are very poisonous to eat. The seeds are large and may be mistaken for a beanlike food.

Habitat and Distribution: This plant is found in all tropical regions and has been introduced to temperate regions.



Chinaberry

Melia azedarach

Mahogany (*Meliaceae*) Family



Description: This tree has a spreading crown and grows up to 14 meters tall. It has alternate, compound leaves with toothed leaflets. Its flowers are light purple with a dark center and grow in ball-like masses. It has marble-sized fruits that are light orange when first formed but turn lighter as they become older.

CAUTION

All parts of the tree should be considered dangerous if eaten. Its leaves are a natural insecticide and will repel insects from stored fruits and grains. Take care not to eat leaves mixed with the stored food.

Habitat and Distribution: Chinaberry is native to the Himalayas and eastern Asia but is now planted as an ornamental tree throughout the tropical and subtropical regions. It has been introduced to the southern United States and has escaped to thickets, old fields, and disturbed areas.

