

**PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
FIFTH SYMPOSIUM  
ON THE  
NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BAHAMAS**

**Edited by  
Lee B. Kass**

**Conference Organizer  
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**Bahamian Field Station, Ltd.  
San Salvador, Bahamas  
1994**

**Cover photo by  
Sandra Buckner**

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**Printed in USA by Don Heuer**

**ISBN 0-935909-52-4**

# POISONOUS PLANTS OF SAN SALVADOR ISLAND, THE BAHAMAS

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## ABSTRACT

Poisonous plants are those plants that cause some type of disturbing effect. These abnormal effects may be any one or more of the following: irritation to the skin upon contact, irritation or other types of problems when eaten, and allergic reactions caused by pollen or spores. There are a number of vascular plant species found on San Salvador Island that can be termed poisonous. These species are also found on other islands in The Bahamas. Among the plants to be discussed are *Hippomane mancinella*, *Metopium toxiferum*, *Abrus precatorius*, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, *Nerium oleander*, *Argemone mexicana*, *Ricinus communis*, *Cryptostegia grandiflora*, and *Phoradendron trinervium*.

## INTRODUCTION

The process of understanding food plants, medicinal plants and poisonous plants has been on going for centuries. As plants have been introduced into cultivation for human use and became important economic plants, it has been important to know which plants were poisonous and in what way they were poisonous. Over the thousands of years, experimentations by humans in finding a new plant food has not only been proven many times beneficial, but in certain instances it has brought on serious illness and even death. It has become known that certain plant families or plant groups possess unique poisonous chemical compounds, while others do not. However, this does not always hold true. The term "poisonous" means that the plant or plant part will cause some kind of disturbing effect, and that effect may be a wide range of disturbances. Some plants or plant part may

produce a mild poisonous effect, while others will have a severe effect to the point of death.

In The Bahamas one often hears of a person, and it may well be a tourist, who tries a plant that "looks edible." The person is actually eating a poisonous plant, becomes very sick, and is in immediate need of emergency medical treatment. Sometimes an individual may obtain a serious dermatitis problem simply because they do not know the plant that produces the skin irritant. There are no known plant poison statistics in The Bahamas, but in the United States each year, it is known that there are approximately 15,000 poisonings alone in children under five years of age.

There are several classes of chemical toxins present in plants. These include alkaloids that affect the central nervous system; alkaloids and other chemical compounds that affect the heart action; toxic oils, irritants that cause dermatitis; and plant dust and pollen that cause allergies. This paper is concerned with plants that produce poisons that cause skin irritations and internal problems.

## THE PAMPHLET ON POISONOUS PLANTS

This article is considered to being a preliminary paper for a larger and more detailed work which will deal with each genus or species, their description, symptoms, and treatment, if known. The final production will be in the form of a pamphlet.

It is the intent of the author to provide the reader of the proceedings with information concerning the poisonous plants of San Salvador Island, The Bahamas. The information at hand is presented in the form of a table (see Table 1) which includes the

Table 1. List of poisonous plants by family including the common name, poisonous effect, and illustration from Correll and Correll (1982).

Scientific Name	Common Name	Poisonous Effect*	Illustration
<b>FAMILY</b>			
<b>POLYPODIACEAE</b>			
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> (L.)Kuhn var. <i>caudatum</i> (L.)Sadebeck	Southern bracken fern	I	p. 40
<b>AMARYLLIDACEAE</b>			
<i>Crinum zeylanicum</i> (L.)L.	Milk and wine lily	I	p. 321
<i>Hymenocallis arenicola</i> Northrop	Spider lily	I	p. 324
<i>Zepharanthes</i> spp.	Zepharanthes	I	p. 328
<b>ANACARDICAEAE</b>			
<i>Metopium toxiferum</i> (L.)Krug & Urb.	Poison wood	D	p. 851
<i>Schinus terebinthifolius</i> Raddi	Brazilian pepper tree	I	p. 855
<b>APOCYNACEAE</b>			
<i>Nerium oleander</i> L.	Oleander	I	p. 1135
<i>Urechites lutea</i> (L.)Britt.	Wild unction	I	p. 1145
<b>ARACEAE</b>			
<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> (L.)Schott	Taro, Eddo	I	no Illus.
<b>ASCLEPIADACEAE</b>			
<i>Caloptropis procera</i> (Ait.)Ait.f.	Giant milkweed	I	p. 1149
<i>Cryptostegia grandiflora</i> R.Br.	Rubber vine	I	p. 1151

**BORAGINACEAE**

<i>Heliotropium</i> spp.	Scorpion's tail	I	p. 1205
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**EUPHORBIACEAE**

<i>Euphorbia</i> spp.	Euphorbia	I	p. 811
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<i>Grimmeodendron eglandulosum</i> (A.Rich.)Urb.	Poison bush	D	p. 819
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<i>Hippomane mancinella</i> L.	Manchineel	D,I	p. 820
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<i>Jatropha multifida</i> L.	Coral tree	I	p. 824
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<i>Manihot esculenta</i> Crantz	Cassava	I	p. 827
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<i>Pedilanthus tithymaloides</i> (L.) Poit.	Slipper flower, Fiddle flower	I	p. 839
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<i>Ricinus communis</i> L.	Castor bean	I	p. 840
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**LAURACEAE**

<i>Cassytha filiformis</i> L.	Love vine, woe vine	I	p. 536
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**LEGUMINOSAE (FABACEAE)**

<i>Abrus precatorius</i> L.	Rosary pea	I	p. 585
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<i>Canavalia rosea</i> (Sw.)DC.	Bay bean	I	p. 612
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<i>Caesalpinia</i> spp.			
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<i>C. bonduc</i> (L.) Roxb.	Nickers	I	
<i>C. vesicaria</i> L.	Brasiletto	I	p. 607

<i>Cassia</i> spp.	Stinking pea, etc.	I	p. 619
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<i>Crotalaria</i> spp.	Rattle box	I	p. 631
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<i>Piscidia piscipula</i> (L.) Sarg.	Fish poison	I	p. 676
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<i>Sophora tomentosa</i> L.	Silver bush	I	p. 689
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**LORANTHACEAE**

*Phoradendron trinervium* (Lam.) Griesb. Mistletoe I p. 431

**MALVACEAE**

*Gossypium hirsutum* L. Cotton I p. 925

**MELIACEAE**

*Melia azedarch* L. Chinaberry I p. 750

*Swietenia mahagoni* (L.) Jacq. Mahogany I p. 753

**PAPAVERACEAE**

*Argemone mexicana* L. Mexican poppy I p. 545

**PHYTOLACCACEAE**

*Phytolacca icosandra* L. Southern Pokeweed I p. 501

**SOLANACEAE**

*Physalis angulata* L. Japanese lantern I p. 1287

*Solanum* spp. Nightshade and related plants I p. 1291

**VERBENACEAE**

*Lantana camara* L. Yellow sage I p. 1232

\* I = internal problems if ingested.

D = dermal problems if in contact with skin.

plant family, the scientific name, common name, description, poisonous effect, and a reference for the illustration. In the final publication this information will be in greater detail accompanied by an illustration and/or photograph with each description.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. and Mrs. Donald Gerace for their continued support of my efforts concerning my work on San Salvador Island.

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