



Trees & Shrubs

What to Know About Gardening Oleander Plants

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Ursula Alter/Getty Images

The [oleander is one of several desert plants](#) that we recommend for people who want desert shrubs or bushes that are perennial (you need to plant them only once), hardy, low care, relatively drought resistant, easy to find, pretty cheap to buy, and provide lovely color many times during the year.



in the flowering area, you'll find white, pink, salmon, and red. The pink and salmon colors are probably the most popular and have the most flowers. Oleanders are pretty fast growers. They can tolerate pretty bad soil, lots of hot sun, and don't need much water.

The oleander is poisonous. However, not many people become seriously ill from oleander. Being around it is not a problem. Just make sure that your children and pets don't eat the leaves or flowers, and don't use the leaves or branches for barbecue fires. Don't use clippings or leaves as mulch, especially if you have pets that spend time in your yard. As with all toxic substances, there is a danger of illness if ingested, and, as with most toxins, the small, the weak and the allergic could be at greater risk.

From time to time, we get feedback from readers who are disappointed that would include oleanders as a recommended yard shrub. Here is one of those complaints, along with our response.

Oleander? I was amazed you listed this nasty toxic tree as #1 on the [desert landscape list](#). These trees are highly toxic and a major allergy problem for many people. Their pollen and leaves get in your pool and the oil sheen floats on the top of the pool. I poisoned my neighbor's privacy row of oleanders with HCL over a year or so time frame so he would take them out. This weed should be outlawed in the state. The cheap cost is the only reason it is used. NASTY NASTY NASTY Tree. Please don't promote this nasty tree as there are so many much better alternatives to it.

Here are our thoughts:



country, and there are others on our list of seven easy desert plants (not mentioned in any particular order, we might add) that fit the poisonous category. Add to that dangerous plants, like anything in the cactus family, and we have a veritable field mine of danger lurking in our yards. We're not saying that oleanders are not dangerous. If they are ingested, they can be very dangerous. According to the Poison Control Center in Arizona, no one there had any recollection of any accidental deaths by oleander going back many years. Now, if someone wants to commit suicide, they can probably do so in many ways, and eating parts of oleanders are on that list.

Oleanders, as we say in the article, are poisonous, and you should be careful with them if you have children or pets. From what we have read, they taste so awful, that a person or pet has to be pretty set on eating any part of it to get it down, but it could happen. That's why we include the following warning in the article: "Just make sure that your children and pets don't eat the leaves or flowers, and don't use the leaves or branches for barbecue fires."

If you aren't ingesting parts of oleanders, you should be fine. Try not to get the sap from freshly trimmed leaves or branches on you as they could cause skin irritation. By the way, I hope you don't have [lantana](#) in your yard.

With respect to allergies, from what we have read, oleanders have fewer allergens than many other flowering plants since they produce less pollen, but the pollen from other plants tends to stay on the long, wide leaves. Our guess is that if one is allergic to oleanders, one is probably allergic to many other flowering plants, as well.

As for slowly and deliberately killing your neighbor's plants--we're not even going there.

After we published this email and my response, we received several additional comments from readers. You can see those here, presented in the order in which they were received. Comments on this topic are now closed.



found oleander leaves in their stomachs. So please don't make light of the truly dangerous characteristic of this plant! Little children and pets can and will eat the most deplorable things. I also had a friend who had to rush her 5-year-old son to the emergency room when he drank a whole cup of bleach that was sitting near the clothes washer to be dumped in the wash!

- Judy Hedding replied: Hello, and thanks for your comments. I didn't at all make light of it. Horrible accidents can and do happen. As you point out, accidental deaths can occur from plants, household chemicals, and in many other seemingly safe situations, like backing out of driveways or riding a bike in the street. It is important for people with children and pets to know that oleanders, like many plants, are poisonous. That's why I mention that in this article about them.
- Kelley wrote: I love oleanders. It is one of the few "plant and forget" trees that put up with our FL heat. I have 2 planted on both sides of my front steps. Our dog digs underneath the steps, laying right beside the oleanders. She has never tried to eat them (unlike the plumbago).
- Deborah wrote: Wow, I'm glad he's not my neighbor. I have Brugmansia all over my yard, AND oleander, so he's be poisoning mine all day long. You might not want to go into his poisoning his neighbor's plants, but I will. This man sounds like someone evil and vicious, who will find something wrong with anything, anytime. I've had a neighbor like that. He poisoned my cats, systematically, one at a time with anti-freeze. I had the last one autopsied, then my friend and I staked out his yard with a video camera and caught him putting out antifreeze at night for cats. He simply hated cats. We waited until the wee hours of the morning, went over the fence and stole his antifreeze, pan and all, and left him a note that if any more of my cats died, we now had video and physical evidence that we were going to take to the police. People like this man are what needs to be kept out of neighborhoods, not oleanders.
- Julie wrote: Me and my family have been really sick for a long time and I just found out about the Oleander issue. I thought oh look they planted Oleander



I recently purchased. Within a few days, I had a few sores on my knees and I attribute it to an allergic reaction to the oleander sap which I must have gotten on my knee. Since then I have had sores pop up on my legs, arms, fingers, and hands. These itch terribly. I am taking Benedryl and covering the spots with Calaclear which is causing the itching to stop and the welts to dry up. But I am still getting a few each day and they are not fun!

- Mica wrote: I was having asthma attacks, swollen face and eyes. I kept ending up in the urgent care. I couldn't figure out what was happening to me. I made sure that anything newly purchased was thrown out, yet I was still getting so sick. I drove to the local shopping center for fast food. I rolled down my window and immediately began to have an asthma attack. I looked around and was encircled by oleander bushes. It may not bother others but I am basically a hostage in my home during their fragrant season. What if I didn't have my inhaler? Is this cheap plant really worth someone's life?
- Rudy wrote: My mother in law was allergic to poinsettias yet you can still buy them anywhere you want at Christmas. My children are allergic to eucalyptus but they have not outlawed that. My point? If we banned every plant or substance that affected certain people...what would be left?

OK, back to the plant! Just like all flowering shrubs, oleanders require occasional trimming. When purchasing an oleander, be aware of the size you are buying. Some oleanders can grow to 20 feet tall! Those are very difficult to trim. Oleanders make a popular divider or hedge, and can even be trained into a tree, although the tree variety might take years to develop a strong trunk and is susceptible to damage during monsoon winds.

