Jimsonweed Encyclopedia Article

Jimsonweed

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Jimsonweed

A tall, coarse, poisonous plant that flowers, produces seed, and dies in one year. It belongs to the nightshade family (Solanaceae), and has foul-smelling leaves and large white or violet trumpet-shaped flowers. It produces round, prickly fruits. Jimsonweed (Datura stramonium) grows in several parts of the world. A strong intoxicant made from this plant was used by the woodland tribes of eastern North America. The plant was also used as an ingredient of wysoccan, an intoxicant employed in the puberty rites of Native Americans in what is now Virginia. Indeed, the name Jimson is another form of Jamestown, the English colony founded in Virginia in 1607.

Smoke from burning jimsonweed was breathed to relieve symptoms of asthma in India, and cigarettes containing jimsonweed have also been used for the same purpose.

As in other members of the Solanaceae family, the mind-altering substances are tropane ALKA-LOIDS, and the seeds and leaves contain up to 0.4 percent of these compounds. The principal alkaloid found in jimsonweed (also found in belladonna) is atropine. Atropine widens the pupils of the eyes, helps stop muscular spasms, lessens pain, and reduces bodily secretions. Large to toxic doses of atropine result in restlessness, irritability, disorientation, hallucinations, and delirium.

See Also

Plants, Drugs From; Scopolamine)

Bibliography

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