

Seasonal Plants

Peace and Goodwill to All?

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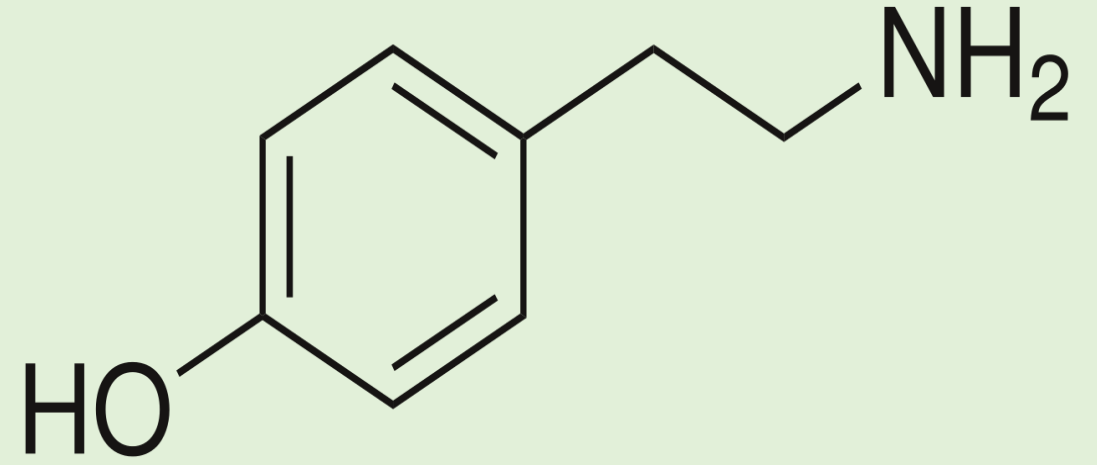
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

- Prickly leaves protect from herbivores
- Prickliness varies...but leaves nearer the ground tend to be more prickly (unless tall herbivores around!)
- Degree of prickliness controlled by methylation of DNA
- Traditionally, prickly leaves known as he-holly and smooth leaves were she-holly
- The first leaves brought into the house at Christmas determined who ruled the home for the next year!



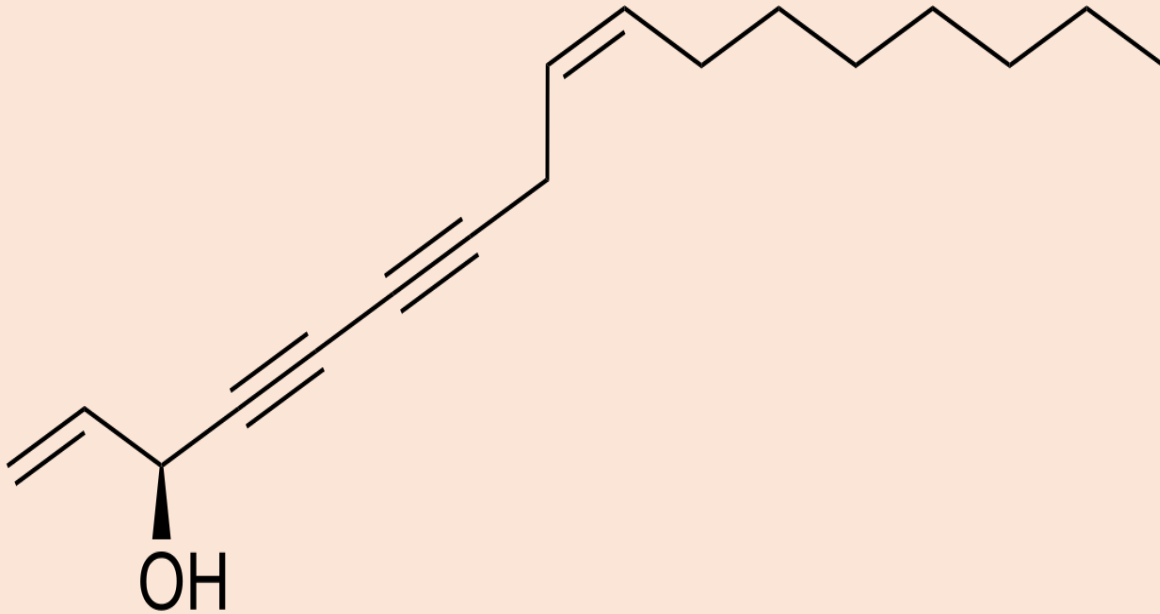
Mistletoe (*Viscum album*)

- Although a hemi-parasite, mistletoe steals most of its nutrients from its host
 - Birdlime, a sticky substance used to trap birds (now illegal in most countries), made from mistletoe berries or holly bark
 - Berries mildly toxic – one of the toxic chemicals is tyramine
 - Tyramine raises blood pressure
- Presence in cheese can cause 'cheese headaches'



Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

- Falcarinol, found in the foliage, can cause contact dermatitis and blisters
- But it has potential use to prevent or slow colon cancer





Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*)

- Native to Mexico. Introduced to North America by Joel R. Poinsett in 1820s
- Milky sap can cause skin irritation and allergic reaction
- Trimming poinsettia in a confined space like a greenhouse releases vapour which can be an irritant

Norway spruce (*Picea abies*)



Apart from its needles falling on the carpet, spruce trees are pretty harmless

Shoots and needles a good source of vitamin C - made into a beer drunk by Captain Cook and his crew to prevent scurvy

However, care needs to be taken...Shetland spruce ale reputed to stimulate animal instincts and give you twins!

For more information on talks etc. see:

www.cambridge-bach.co.uk/vervain-publishing/talks-tours-workshops/

To book CUBG workshop: www.botanic.cam.ac.uk/education-learning/courses/online-course-chemical-warfare-and-co-operation-in-the-garden/