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Yesterday was Friday the 13th, and in some sort of dyslexic dystopia, the 31st is just around the corner and Halloween will soon arrive. So, it seems only right to write of that which is wrong - or shall we say – wicked, as in *Wicked Plants*. There is an excellent book by just that title, “*Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln’s Mother and Other Botanical Atrocities*” by Amy Stewart. I recommend it, but for now, let us take a little Almaniatic trip into the world of some plants wicked this way comes, through the house of horticultural horrors, guided by myself, and fellow OSU-Secret Arboretoids, Paul Snyder, Joe Cochran, and Matt Shultzman.

Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*). Atop most of our lists would be poison ivy, and this is as good as a time as any to remind ourselves that the itchy immune response that some of us suffer does not end with the lovely fall color of poison ivy’s, nor with its cream-white berries. The itch-worthy urushiol chemical is quite present in the vines that remain on the trees through the winter, or on gloves, not to mention, at least for a while, on the fur of pets. So do not think you have a free pass. ‘Tis ever the season for poison ivy.

Speaking of urushiol, should you ever have an urge to collect the fleshy “golden apricot” arils from ginkgo trees, foraging the art-cuisinal seeds inside, wear gloves while you collect and wash away the aromas of butyric acid that surround the soft tissue surrounding the seeds. Many an edible landscaping aficionado has made the rash decision to collect and not protect - from the form of urushiol in *Ginkgo biloba*.

The Addams Family of Plants. There are several plant families running a bit to the wicked. A family of plants is an official classification of related plants, namely a group of related genera (plural). A genus (singular) is a group of related species. For example, the Solanaceae is a family of plants with numerous species of various poisonous features. *Atropa belladonna*, deadly nightshade is one such solanaceous plant, and featured in Amy Stewart’s book, but there are many others, from the jimsonweed (*Datura* species) hallucinogen/poison, to tomatoes. Yes, tomatoes: we are, thankfully, well past the time when it was thought that eating tomatoes would turn our blood to acid, but part of the tomato plant actually are poisonous – but not the fruits that we eat.

Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*). It depends upon one’s perspective, but I have it on second-hand authority, at least, that the tobacco plant is wicked. Obviously indicted and convicted for a number of cancers and respiratory displeasures, this plant native to the Americas was named for a French diplomat to Portugal, Jean Nicot. Monsieur Nicot brought the strange new plant back to the French court in the 16th century. Then with a stroke of his poison pen, Linnaeus, that energetic Swedish plant-namer of the 18th century “honored” poor Jean, forever enshrining his name with our modern nicotine-stained smoke-clogged images.

Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*). This Asian native is a good example that the road to wickedness is lined with once well-behaved trees. Brought to the United States from Asia to cross with fruiting pears for better fireblight resistance, they proved an alluring ornamental of white flowers, glossy leaves and rarely-seen fruits until the ‘Bradford’ cultivar fell into disfavor for breaking in storms. Other cultivars replaced the self-infertile ‘Bradford’ but then the cultivars began crossing with the unintended consequence of Callery pears now being reviewed for banned nursery production status by the Ohio Invasive Plant Council. Time wounds all heels.

Black walnut. (*Juglans nigra*). How could anyone speak badly about this almost transcendental contributor to the world’s best brownies: flavored by earthy chunks of black walnuts. Wow. Or black walnut ice cream. Incomparable. Yet. Yet. Double yet. First, black walnuts practice chemical warfare of the herbicidal-maniac ilk.

They produce juglone, which is considered allelopathic to other plants, most notable tomato, blackberry and rhododendron. Juglone is produced by all parts of black walnut, including roots, in turn damaging roots of susceptible plants. Thus, do not plant tomatoes within the root zone of black walnut trees, a zone that can extend over a hundred feet for a large black walnut tree.

Second, and OSU forester Kathy Smith often reminds me of this, foresters working under black walnut trees in the woods prefer a hard hat for fall wear, better to weather the bombarding of fruits on a windy day.

True Mistletoes (*Phoradendron* species) Not long ago, I wrote of dwarf mistletoes (*Arceuthobium* species), flowering parasitic plants that attached to junipers in the Utah desert, feeding on the hard-earned carbohydrates produced through photosynthesis in the juniper foliage. Recently, at a program on a horse farm in Kentucky, we espied a different type of mistletoe in the black walnut trees. Little round balls of foliage, a different shade of green from the black walnut leaves. This was “true mistletoe”, denoted a hemi-parasite, because in addition to sucking sap from the plant, this kiss-and-do-tell mistletoe also produces some carbohydrate in its own green leaves. True mistletoes grow in Ohio, but mostly in the most southern part of the state. Another of Nature’s trick-*and-treats*.

I could go on and on. Devil’s walking stick, a native tree with spiny stems, stinging nettles with their urticated hairs, mandrake the aphrodisiacal wildflower, the thorned holly hedge moat surrounding the Auburn University football field, persimmon fruits that if not fully ripe will suck all moisture right out of your mouth. Enough. Wicked. For. Today.