Beauty in the Garden: Medicinal, Toxic, Benign

Toxicologist Captures Poisons and Panaceas of Medicinal Plants at Alpert Photo Exhibit

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PROVIDENCE—**JASON B. HACK, MD**, has been taking photos of medicinal and poisonous plants for years. A variety of his images, all taken in Rhode Island with a Nikon 5200, are now on display in the Alpert Medical School lobby.

Dr. Hack is division director of Medical Toxicology, director for the educational program in medical toxicology, and an associate professor of emergency medicine.

He completed his residency training in emergency medicine at Bellevue Hospital in New York, and a fellowship in toxicology at the New York City Poison Center. His research interests include assessment of intoxicated patients and adverse events associated with medications, drugs of abuse, and new antidotes.

Recently, RIMJ posed a few questions to Dr. Hack about his avocation.

Q. How did you become interested in photography?

A. As an academic emergency physician and medical toxicologist I do a lot of teaching. Nothing sticks in the mind better than a striking image. For years I had been annoying my family as we were out and about with "wait, wait, I just want to get a picture of this…" if I saw anything that I might possibly have reason to talk about in a future lecture. A couple of thousand pictures later I'd amassed a pretty broad library of medical/toxicology related photos.

A few years ago my wife encouraged me to start exercising more to have a break from work. I decided I wanted to 'power walk' a few miles a day in my new neighborhood. With all good intentions I struck out on my first day decked out in shorts and new sneakers, ready to forget about work for a short time and work up a sweat marching

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JASON HACK, MD

Morning glory
The seeds of many species of morning glory contain a naturally occurring tryptamine lysergic acid amide (LSA). Chemical differs slightly from LSD and effects are similar when taken in large doses.

Jimsonweed
Datura stramonium contains atropine, hyoscyamine, hyoscine, and scopolamine: belladonna alkaloids that block peripheral and central muscarinic receptors from binding acetylcholine. This blockade results in an anticholinergic toxidrome. The mnemonic for this syndrome—"blind as a bat [big pupils], mad as a hatter [altered mental status, hallucinations, delirium], red as a beet [flushed skin], hot as a hare [fever], dry as a bone [dry mouth], full as a flask [full bladder but can't urinate], silent as a mouse [no bowel movements]"—helps doctors remember its symptoms.