

192. *KALMIA LATIFOLIA* L. (ERICACEAE) — Mountain Laurel

Beautiful evergreen ornamental, namesake of Laurel, Md. The hard wood has had many uses.

Reported to be alterative, astringent, cardiac, narcotic, poison, sedative, mountain laurel is a folk remedy for diarrhea, dysentery, eruptions, fever, flux, hemorrhage, infection, jaundice, neuralgia, ophthalmia, rash, skin ailments, syphilis, and warts.^{2,32,33} Ointments for skin ailments were prepared by stewing the leaves in lard; salves made from the laurel's juices are applied to rheumatism.² Homeopaths use the laurel in heart preparations.

Per 100 g, the toxic forage is reported to contain, on a dry basis, 8.7 g protein, 9.5 g fat, 78.2 g total carbohydrate, 14.7 g fiber, 3.6 g ash, 960 mg Ca, 110 mg P, and 5.0 mg Fe.²¹ Poisonous principles may be andromedotoxin (acetyl andromedol), arbutin, tannic acid.² Leaves contain 2.7% of the dihydrochalcone phloridzine, phlorizine (C₂₁H₂₄O₁₀), asebotin (C₂₂H₂₆O₁₀), catechin-tannin, rhodotoxin, grayanotoxin-I (also in the pollen), pectin, saccharose, invertin, emulsin.³³

Toxicity — Narcotic² once used by Amerindians to commit suicide. "Whiskey is the best antidote." Experimental administration (injection) to lower animals produces salivation, lacrymation, emesis, convulsions, and, later, paralysis of the extremities and labored respiration.² Leaves, shoots, and fruits are dangerous to cattle and birds which feed on the plant, as honey made from the flowers may be poisonous to man.²

To the physician — Hardin and Arena suggest gastric lavage or emesis, activated charcoal, atropine, and hypotensive drugs.³⁴