

Jimsonweed

■ **Overview:** Jimson weed is a common name for a plant known botanically as *Datura stramonium*, which has been used as a medicine and intoxicant for centuries. The plant's main ingredients are the belladonna alkaloids *atropine* and *scopolamine*. Since Jimson weed is native to much of the U.S. (from New England to Texas), it's most often used by young people in those areas unfamiliar with its reputation and unprepared for its side effects.



■ **Street Names:** Thornapple, stinkweed, locoweed

■ **Appearance:** Jimson weed can reach a height of 5 feet, bearing white flowers and prickly seed pods that split open when ripe, usually in fall.

■ **Effects:** The phrase “Red as a beet, dry as a bone, blind as a bat, mad as a hatter” has been used to describe Jimson’s effects, and it does a good job of summing them up. All parts of the plant are toxic, so pleasant effects are limited—a big reason the plant is used only by novices. Atropine and scopolamine block the neurotransmitter *acetylcholine*, causing dry mouth, dilated pupils, high temperature (but reduced sweating), and blurred vision. Psychological effects include confusion, euphoria, and delirium.



■ **Side Effects/Risks:** Potential for accidental poisoning increases with higher doses. Symptoms include incoherent speech, impaired coordination; rapid heart beat; and dry, flushed or hot skin. In extreme cases, users can experience seizures, intense visual or auditory hallucinations, or cardiac arrest. A Jimson weed overdose should be considered potentially serious and medical intervention sought.



■ **Addiction Potential:** Since Jimson weed's effects aren't generally considered pleasurable, addiction usually isn't a factor.

■ **Medical Uses:** Because of its anticholinergic properties and antispasmodic effects, Jimson weed was used in traditional medicine to treat a variety of illnesses. Today, extracts are still used in treating asthma, intestinal cramps, and both diarrhea and bed-wetting.

■ **Duration:** Depends on dose, with most effects beginning within two hours of use and some lingering up to 24-48 hours.

■ **Legal Issues:** Jimson weed is not a controlled substance.

■ **Trends:** Most Jimson weed use tends to be of the one-time-only, thrill-seeking or curiosity variety, typically involving younger teens. Few statistics are available on use, but in 2009, only 987 cases of poisoning by anticholinergic plants (including Jimson weed) were reported nationally, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers.



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