



July 2003

## Salvia Divinorum

Salvia divinorum is a soft-leaved green plant, native to Mexico, which contains a psychoactive chemical known as Salvinorin-A. Salvia divinorum is also known as "la pastora", "the shepherdess", "the leaves of the shepherdess", "mint", "diviner's mint", "diviner's sage" or "sadi". It is being widely touted on internet sites aimed at young adults and adolescents eager to experiment. It is sold as dried leaf, extracts and live plants. Although it's popularity has increased since the late 1990's, most users only use it once or a few times due to unpleasant effects.

The plant is usually smoked but sometimes chewed (as a "quid") and held in the mouth for about 30 minutes. Salvinorin-A is inactive when swallowed. The effects last from 15 minutes to over 3 hours. Salvia divinorum induces "mystical" or hallucinogenic experiences, described by its users to be similar to those induced by ketamine, mescaline, or psilocybin. Although the mechanism of action is not fully understood, it is said to result in REM activity while still awake. At low doses, the effects can be subtle. At higher doses, users often report dramatic time distortion, vivid imagery, encounters with beings, travel to other places, planets or times or experiencing the full life of another individual. Salvia divinorum is not considered a 'party drug', as its effects are not particularly conducive to social interaction, and tend towards the non-verbal. It can produce overly-intense experiences, fear, terror and panic. Those experienced with Salvia divinorum generally use it in quiet settings for introspective contemplation and meditation.

There is little information on the toxicity of the plant; however, traumatic injuries and anxiety attacks have been reported. Report any cases of salvia divinorum adverse effects or overdoses to the Maryland Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**.

Lisa Booze, PharmD, CSPI

### ***DID YOU KNOW THAT.....* Giant Hogweed has been found in Maryland?**

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a member of the parsley or carrot family. It may grow to 15-20 feet in height. It has hollow stems, 2 to 4 inches in diameter with dark spots and bristles. The leaves may grow up to five feet in width with numerous white flowers clustered in an umbrella-shaped head. It closely resembles cow parsnip. The sap contains toxins (furanocoumarins and psoralens) that cause photo dermatitis. Skin contact followed by exposure to sunlight produces painful, burning blisters that may develop into purplish or blackened scars. Giant hogweed is on the federal noxious weed list. Sightings should be reported to the MD Department of Agriculture at 410-841-5920.

Call the poison center (1-800-222-1222) to report exposures to this plant.



Post and share this edition of **toxtidbits** with your colleagues. Send any comments or questions to: **toxtidbits**, 410.706.7184 (fax) or [Lbooze@rx.umaryland.edu](mailto:Lbooze@rx.umaryland.edu).

If you do not wish to receive faxes or emails from the Maryland Poison Center, call 410.706.7604 or circle your fax number and fax this back to 410.706.7184. Supported by Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene