

Food

By Betty Brown

HERBS: HEALTHFUL OR HAZARDOUS

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Herbs have conjured up mystical, magical images of health and healing for centuries.

Their importance is perhaps emphasized by the fact that herbs outnumbered gold two to one among gifts bestowed by the Three Wise Men.

While some herbs have been found to contain useful drugs, such as digitalis derived from the foxglove plant, caution must be used in dealing with herbs or herbal products.

In their search for low calorie, caffeine free drinks, a growing number of people are turning to herbal teas. Many have been used for centuries with no apparent toxic reactions. How-

ever, this doesn't mean these teas are entirely safe, especially when they are consumed in large amounts over extended periods of time.

We don't know enough about herbal teas to conclude that they are safe.

Herbs contain chemicals (morphine and nicotine), that are particularly potent. These chemicals are released in hot water.

Some of these chemicals build up in body tissues with continued use and can cause serious health problems down the road.

A recent medical journal article told of a young woman who suffered excessive menstrual bleeding. It was discovered that an herbal tea she had consumed in large amounts for two weeks as a tonic

contained substances that reduced the ability of the blood to clot. This homemade tonic could have cost this young woman her life.

Ironically, those who drink herbal teas to avoid exposure to caffeine submit themselves to a number of chemicals about which little is known.

Less than one percent of all plant species are poisonous. The odds of ingesting a deadly plant seem large. But one should remember that it only takes one error.

For example, foxglove has been mistaken for comfrey with lethal results and water hemlock can easily be mistaken for several members of the parsley family.

Reactions to herbs vary greatly. Most Americans are not harmed by

toxic substances in foods because they eat a balanced diet, which, among other things, means nothing in excess.

Even some nutrients essential to survival can become health hazards when consumed in large amounts, such as Vitamins A and D.

Even nontoxic herbs and foods can be dangerous for those who are allergic. Someone allergic to ragweed might have a severe reaction to chamomile tea because they belong to the same plant family.

You just have to be careful. Just because there isn't a report saying an herb or product is toxic doesn't mean it isn't. It may just mean that it hasn't been tested.

Free Cooking Class Offered

The Cooperative Extension Service will sponsor a free crockpot cooking class to be held on Jan. 26, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Cooperative Extension Service, S.T.&P. Building - Rm. 207, 953 East Sahara Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Men and women are

both welcome! You will learn the advantages of cooking with a crockpot, the nutritional quality of food cooked in a crockpot and safety precautions to use when crockpot cooking.

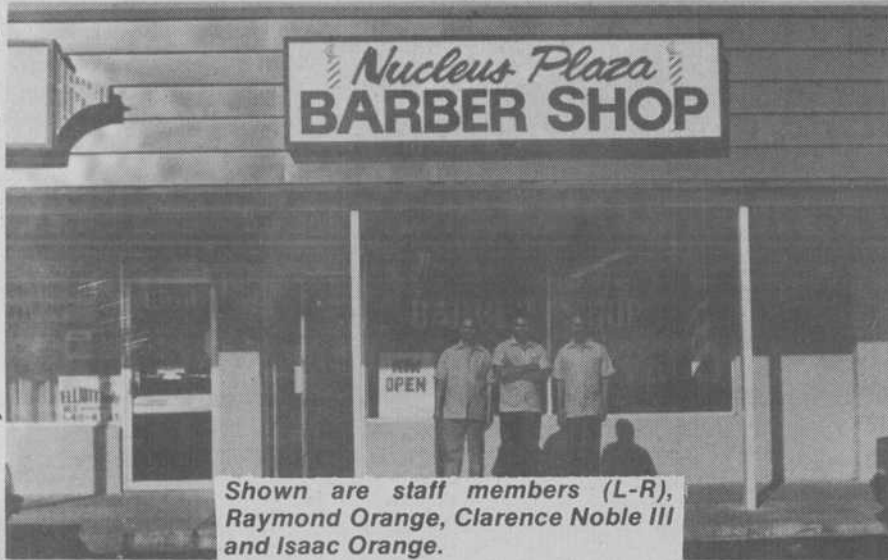
Please call at least five days prior to the class to make reservations or for more information.

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