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Deadly flowers could help create new medicines – 10th August 2026

Level 4

The world is full of amazing natural medicines. However, many species of flowers can poison and kill people. Researchers in the USA and Czechia have found that two very poisonous plants could be used to make new medicines. The scientists conducted research on two flowers: wolfsbane and larkspur. Wolfsbane can cause death from respiratory paralysis or heart failure. "Biohacking" of the plants' chemical makeup could create valuable medicines.

The researchers recreated the toxic compounds from the plants. One researcher said knowing how to create them could provide totally new ways of testing. They could reduce pain, treat malaria and cancer, and kill pests. A biochemist said: "Plants are the best chemists around, upgrading their... natural compounds over millions of years to help them survive." Another researcher said many of today's medicines come directly from plants.

Level 5

The world is full of natural medicinal wonders, but some species of flowers can be deadly. They have been used for centuries to poison people. However, botanists in the USA and Czechia have discovered that two particularly poisonous plants could be used to make new medicines. The scientists conducted research on two flowers: wolfsbane and larkspur. Small amounts of wolfsbane could cause death from respiratory paralysis or heart failure. Larkspur can cause skeletal muscle weakness. "Biohacking" of the plants' chemical makeup could create valuable medicines.

The researchers recreated the toxic compounds from the two plants. A study co-author said: "Understanding how to create them can help provide totally new routes for testing." They could be used to reduce pain, to treat malaria and cancer, and to kill pests. A biochemist said: "Plants are the best chemists around, upgrading their arsenal of natural compounds over millions of years to help them survive." Another researcher said: "Many of the medicines we use today either come directly from plants or are inspired by plant chemistry."

Level 6

The world of plants is full of natural medicinal wonders, but some species of flowers can be deadly. Killers have used these for centuries to poison people. However, botanists at Michigan State University and the Czech Academy of Sciences have discovered that two particularly poisonous plants could have properties that may be used to make new medicines. The scientists conducted research on two flowers: wolfsbane and larkspur. Ingestion of small amounts of wolfsbane could cause death from respiratory paralysis or heart failure. The toxic larkspur can cause skeletal muscle weakness. Researchers say "biohacking" of the plants' chemical makeup could create valuable therapeutics.

The researchers recreated the toxic compounds from the two plants. Study co-author Dr Garret Miller said: "We know they interact with our bodies in so many ways, and understanding how to create them can help provide totally new routes for testing." They could be used as a painkiller, to treat malaria and cancer, and to kill pests. Researcher and biochemistry professor Bjorn Hamberger said: "Plants are the best chemists around, upgrading their arsenal of natural compounds over millions of years to help them survive." Another researcher, Lana Mutabdzija, said: "Many of the medicines we use today either come directly from plants or are inspired by plant chemistry."