
Mounties' musical ride on tour

Canada's internationally famed RCMP Musical Ride will tour Saskatchewan and the western United States this autumn. Performances are scheduled for the Pomona State Fair, Los Angeles, September 16 to October 1; Fresno District Fair, October 3 to 10; the Pacific National Livestock Exposition, Portland, October 14 to 21; the Grand National Horse Show at the Cow Palace, San Francisco, October 27 to November 5, and Kansas City, Missouri, November 13 to 18.

The RCMP Musical Ride is performed by a mounted troop of 32 members of the force drawn from detachments across Canada for a two-year tour of duty. The horses, which are three-quarter thoroughbred, are raised on the force's ranch at Pakenham, Ontario, and both men and horses train together for four months before any engagements are undertaken.

The Ride is composed of a variety of intricate movements executed at the trot and canter to an appropriate musical accompaniment. The figures performed are derived from cavalry drill and demand the utmost in control, timing and co-ordination.

Although it is recorded that a North West Mounted Police musical ride was performed in 1876, it was not until 1904 that the Ride was put on public display.

In the ensuing years, mounted troops of the force journeyed abroad to participate in various functions and in recent years the RCMP Musical Ride has become a familiar sight in the United States and in Europe.

Waterbed babies

Infants are helping staff at a Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario hospital try out new waterbeds in the neonatal intensive care unit.

Doctors say the new beds, which duplicate the warm space in a mother's womb and cut down on sound and vibrations from machinery used to operate incubators, encourage babies to move less and gain weight at a fast rate.

Premature babies may be in incubators for months, and because their heads are soft, pediatricians say they have a tendency to become misshapen. Waterbeds help prevent this.

The first waterbed used by the hospi-

tal was made two years ago by a father for his two-month-old premature daughter, Melissa, who was kept on it for two months.

When Melissa was first put on the bed, nurses became worried because the baby was so quiet. They moved her to an ordinary mattress and she immediately started to cry. Returned to the waterbed, she went to sleep.

The hospital now has found a commercial manufacturer for the beds.

Beware of berries

Most Canadians are unaware that over 700 species of plant have been known to cause illness or death, says Professor Jack Alex, an associate professor of plant taxonomy (science of classification) at the University of Guelph, Ontario.

"Many poisonous plants are so common and seemingly innocuous that you don't even suspect their toxic qualities," he said. For example, the twigs and foliage of choke cherry or black cherry trees can be deadly. They contain a compound that releases cyanide when eaten.

And many people have died merely from eating steaks cooked outdoors that have been speared on oleander twigs, which contain a deadly heart stimulant.

"It's easy to be deceived by plants, for one part may be edible while another is poisonous, like the cherry tree," Professor Alex said.

Another example is the peach tree, whose leaves contain hydrocyanic acid, one of the most dangerous poisons known.

Even two of our most popular vegetables, the potato and tomato, come from plants related to the deadly nightshade. Fresh potatoes and tomatoes are harmless but the vines and foliage of both plants contain alkaloid poisons that can cause severe digestive disorder.

One of the most dangerous of all plants in the garden is rhubarb, Professor Alex said. The leaf blade contains oxalic acid, which crystallizes in the kidneys, causing severe damage.

Jimson weed, commonly called thorn apple or stinkweed, is reported to be responsible for more deaths than any other plant. All parts are poisonous.

The greatest threats to children are plants with berries. One summer, a girl prepared a play luncheon in her backyard with an apple, a radish and some berries

she picked in her mother's rock garden. About seven hours later she was dead.

An autopsy showed that the berries were from the daphne mezereum plant. They contain a corrosive poison that produces severe burns in the mouth and digestive tract.

Even more dangerous than berries are the seeds of some plants. Examples are the rosary pea and castor bean seeds, both toxic enough to be lethal.

Other common plants which can cause problems include jasmine, buttercups, iris, lily-of-the-valley, azaleas, daffodils, hyacinth and narcissus.

Professor Alex said that after working with these plants, care should be taken to wash the fingers, because juice from the plants may stick to them and inadvertently be transferred to the mouth.

Because one never knows which plants are poisonous, children should be taught to keep away from unfamiliar vegetation and very small children should be kept away from all plants so they don't put them in their mouths.

If someone does eat a poisonous plant, take the patient and a sample of the plant immediately to the nearest hospital. Never attempt home remedies.

"Only a trained doctor will know what the proper antidote must be," warned Professor Alex.

Energy monitor

An accurate, inexpensive monitor of energy that is consumed by lighting has been developed by the National Research Council. The meter records the number of hours a lighting circuit has been turned on (for a period of up to 12 months). Because it can be powered from batteries or photo-voltaic cells, the device does not use any power from the line circuit.

National figures for lighting energy consumption are based on annual lamp sales and estimates of their use. Present methods of confirming these estimates usually entail great expense, the use of electrical contractors to install in-series meters, and visually obtrusive measuring devices. The new system is inexpensive, simple to install, and requires only one device for each switching circuit.

By reading the meter daily or weekly, building owners can determine the dollar savings possible by regulating the lighting demand during peak energy consumption periods.