Fiddlehead season is here! There is a long tradition of foraging for these ferns in northern New England, and they can be a tasty spring treat, as long as you take care when harvesting and cooking them.

The fiddleheads that we eat come from the ostrich fern, but other ferns can grow similar fronds. These may not be as delicious, and they may even be harmful. Be sure you know how to identify ostrich ferns if you are foraging.

It's also important to wash fiddleheads and cook them thoroughly to avoid foodborne illness. You can steam them for 10-12 minutes or boil them for 15.

We have some additional fiddlehead information on our website.

Browntail moths are coming to a coast near you

Browntail moths are a growing problem in parts of Maine, particularly in the Midcoast region, and this year is expected to be one of the worst seasons yet.

In the caterpillar stage, these moths grow tiny poisonous hairs that they shed into the air, causing lung and skin irritation. People who are particularly sensitive can develop a severe rash that lasts for weeks.

If you are having symptoms that you think are related to browntail moth caterpillars, give the poison center a call at 1-800-222-1222 for quick advice about you can do at home or whether you need to visit your doctor.

We have some tips for dealing with the caterpillars if you have them in your yard, and the Maine Forest Service has additional information.
CLINICAL CORNER

Methotrexate: Dosing for disaster

Every year the NNEPC manages several cases involving serious methotrexate toxicity stemming from therapeutic error. Dosing for this drug, prescribed to outpatients for rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis and other autoimmune diseases, is often weekly, which can be confusing to the patient and caregivers—many of the severe cases are the result of mistaken daily dosing.

Methotrexate can cause severe drops in blood cells, leading to infection and other problems. Toxic effects can range from gastrointestinal to neurologic symptoms and begin days or even weeks after methotrexate administration.

To help prevent serious errors, it's important that health care providers at every stage and setting of treatment emphasize weekly dosing of methotrexate, using clear verbal and written instructions. Providers can also help by limiting prescriptions to a 30-day supply (4 doses, rather than 30) and by confirming an oncology diagnosis in any patient with an order for daily methotrexate.

Please read our full post for additional information on methotrexate toxicity and suggestions for preventing therapeutic error.

The NNEPC is here for you 24/7

Remember, the poison center is here for you every day to help in poison emergencies and to answer questions about medications, pesticides, cleaning products and more. Call 1-800-222-1222, chat online at nnepc.org or text the word POISON to 85511.