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In the "Harry Potter" series, Tom Riddle's wand was made of yew, which is very powerful and leans toward dark magic.

Exploring the magical plants of Harry Potter

By Arthur O. Tucker
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J. K. Rowling, much like her predecessor J. R. R. Tolkien of "Lord of the Rings," invented an entire world with its own landscape and plants. Some plants, like gillyweed (used to breathe underwater), was entirely an invention from Rowling's fervent imagination. Many others have real-life representatives.

Mandrake (*Mandragora spp.*) is a real plant that is even in the Old Testament (Genesis 30:14-19), where the odor was mentioned as an aphrodisiac. However, it is intensely poisonous, and the fruits were also known as Satan's apples.

The real magic centers around its harvesting. The roots, often in the shape of a human, were said to be the embodiment of demons, and pulling out of the ground would elicit blood-curdling shrieks powerful enough to kill.

Thus, a black dog was said to be tethered to the mandrake to pull it up instead. In "Harry Potter," the mandrake plant actually took on human characteristics, showing emotions and throwing parties. Its scream was known to kill students at Hogwarts, so they had to wear earmuffs for protection. Mandrakes were used in the Restorative Draught potion that was used against Death Eaters.

Wolfsbane (*Aconitum spp.*) is intensely poisonous. Even handling the seeds of some species can be lethal. During the Middle Ages, wolfsbane was supposed to have been mixed with crushed glass to poison wolves, thus the name. Wolfsbane

in the "Harry Potter" series was used to relieve the symptoms of a werewolf; however it could not cure the individual from the transformation. It was also used in the Draught of Living Death potion, which was a powerful sleeping brew.

Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*), or deadly nightshade, was mixed with wolfsbane to make a "flying potion" that was applied to the witch's broom (usually ridden commando-style). It is intensely hallucinogenic and poisonous. In the Italian Renaissance, women used to put dilute drops of belladonna in their eyes to make their pupils appear larger (thus, "Bella Donna," or "Beautiful Woman"). Every student at Hogwarts was given belladonna in their potion kits due to its exquisite magical properties and uses in many spells.

Holly (*Ilex spp.*) was a symbol of resurrection for the ancient Celts, and thus is present in many graveyards even today. The Ancient Greeks attributed magical powers to holly, and Harry thus used a wand of this white wood (with a phoenix feather) to counteract poisons and repel dark magic.

Yews (*Taxus spp.*) are traditional in graveyards as symbols of resurrection, dating back to the ancient Celts. Yew was sometimes used by the English to make bows. Tom Riddle's wand was made of yew, which is very powerful and leans toward dark magic. Yew grew in the Forbid-

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den Forest.

Dittany (*Origanum dictamnus*) is a marjoram growing wild on the mountainsides of Crete. It has been valued for its healing properties since the time of ancient Greece. In "Harry Potter," dittany was used in the Wiggensweld Potion to grow new skin over wounds.

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is infamous for the stinging hairs on its leaves and stems. In the past it was used for many medicinal purposes. Nettle was used in several potions in "Harry Potter," including one for curing boils. They also used it to make nettle wine.

The Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University will be hosting "The Real World of Harry Potter" for children ages 6 to 13 Oct. 21 and 22.

Children will be able to visit Ollivander's Wand Shop, where they can see over seventy different wands, and learn about the

trees they were made from. They will also visit a herbology class and play with a mandrake if they dare! Imagine their delight when they see and learn about some of the world's most bizarre plants, including plants that move!

They will also get a chance to discover the herbs that were used in Harry Potter's potions and spells.

Children must be accompanied by one parent and pre-registered for one of the four sessions: Oct. 21 or 22 (5:30-6:30 or 6:30-7:30 each night). This event will be held at the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University; the suggested donation is \$2.00 per child. Space is limited so register now! Call Sandy at 302-857-6415.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.

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