

POISONOUS WEED FACT SHEET

Horses will graze some toxic plants. Some plants are highly toxic in all cases. Others can be more or less toxic, depending upon the conditions under which they grow. Poisoning is always related to dose; the more your animal consumes of the principal toxin, the greater the effect the animal will suffer. *If you believe your horse has been poisoned, consult a qualified veterinarian immediately.* Although most toxic plants are not very tasty, horse poisoning is more likely under these circumstances:

- Horses are very hungry or thirsty.
- Abundant, suitable forage is unavailable.
- Horses are young or newly introduced to the area.
- Plants are grazed at their most toxic stage, or horses graze the most toxic plant parts.
- Horses are allowed to graze in heavy stands of toxic plants.
- Horses are grazed on rangelands early in the spring when poisonous plants may be the only green vegetation.
- Hay has been contaminated by weeds such as starthistle.
- Hay or pasture contains grasses with long awns, such as medusahead or foxtail barley, which can cause mechanical injury.

The likelihood of toxicity varies by plant species, plant part, growing season, soil conditions, and age and health of the horse. Some weeds, such as mustards, must be eaten in large quantities. Others, such as the hemlocks, are highly toxic. Death will follow ingestion of a very small amount. Some weeds which are toxic to cattle or sheep do not appear to harm horses. We have provided at short table (see right) of plants in Central and Eastern Oregon that present the greatest amount of concern to horse owners.

Plants of greatest concern to horse owners in Central & Eastern OR		
Common Name	Plant Habitat	Comments
Bracken fern <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	burned over areas, woodlands, shady places, open areas	Toxic whether eaten fresh or in hay. Horses may develop a taste for it.
Chokecherry <i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Common tree in fencerows and woods	All plant parts potentially toxic. The plant is most toxic in spring and summer.
Fiddleneck or tarweed <i>Amsinckia intermedia</i>	dry cultivated soils and wastes	
Hairy vetch <i>Vicia villosa</i>		
Hemp dogbane <i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>	fields and roadsides	
Horsetail <i>Equisetum spp.</i>	widely distributed in the landscape	All parts are toxic to horses.
Jimsonweed <i>Datura stramonium</i>		All plant parts toxic and remain toxic when dried.
Lambsquarter <i>Chenopodium album</i>	pastures and fields	This plant concentrates nitrate in leaves.
Larkspur <i>Delphinium spp.</i>		New growth and seeds are most toxic, and remain toxic when dried.
Locoweed <i>Astragalus and Oxytropis spp.</i>	semiarid regions	
Milkvetch <i>Astragalus spp.</i>	meadows and forests of Rocky Mountains and the semiarid southwest	
Nightshade <i>Solanum nigrum</i>	disturbed soils	This plant is highly unpalatable; the chief concern is its presence in hay.
Poison Hemlock <i>Conium maculatum</i>	roadsides, edges of fields and waste areas where soil is moist	All parts highly toxic.
Red Maple <i>Acer rubrum</i>		Leaves are highly toxic.
Russian thistle, kochia, oat hay <i>Rumex spp.</i>		Nitrate concentrates in leaves, oxalic acid poisoning.
St. Johnswort, Klamath weed <i>Hypericum perforatum</i>		Causes sunburning.
Tansy Ragwort <i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	widely distributed	
Water Hemlock <i>Cicuta douglasii</i>	wetlands	All parts highly toxic.
Yellow starthistle <i>Centaurea solstitialis</i>	pasture/hay	Toxic whether eaten green or in hay.
Yew <i>Taxus spp.</i>		Leaves are toxic.

Additional Resources

The Internet has many websites offering information on livestock and toxic plants. The quality of the information is likely to be more reliable on university or governmental sites, rather than on retail sites.

USDA, Agricultural Research Services, Poisonous Plant Research, Products and Services. *This site is a database of poisonous plants searchable by common name only. Not all plants are poisonous to horses, but the database includes detailed information, clear photos and maps showing the distribution of the plant on the north American continent.*
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Services/docs.htm?docid=9781>

Plants Poisonous to Livestock and Horses. Oregon State University Extension Service, Linn County. *This site is specific for the mid-Willamette Valley, but shows clear photos of many of the species included in the table above. About half of these include live links to a toxic weed series produced for the same region. It is difficult to determine whether those without links are toxic to horses or to some other livestock species.* <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/linn/content1/poisonplants.php>

Poisonous Plants Informational Database. Cornell University. *This site is easy to navigate and permits searching on a number of parameters, including plant common name and species affected. It includes clear photos of plant species.*
<http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/>

Indiana Plants Poisonous to Livestock and Pets. Cooperative Extension Service, Purdue University. *Although written for Midwestern livestock and pet owners, this website includes many plants with widespread distribution in the West. This site is easy to use and allows search by animal species, plant common name, plant scientific name, and more. The fact sheets are well organized and easy to navigate, and include clear photos of the plants.*
<http://www.vet.purdue.edu/depts/add/toxic/cover1.htm>

Poisonous Weeds of Pastures and Forages. Cooperative Extension, University of Wisconsin. *Although targeting specifically a Wisconsin audience, this site, which does not include photos or illustrations, includes important information every horse owner concerned about poisonous plants in the pasture should read and consider, as well as additional resources for more information.*
http://ipcm.wisc.edu/uw_weeds/extension/articles/poisonpasture.htm

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