

Poisonous Plants In Pastures

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Weeds in pasture are not only a nuisance, but also can be toxic to your animals. While most weeds are not toxic, there are several that are found in pastures that can have serious side effects including even death. This article is a crash course in some poisonous plants that are found in Indiana pastures.

Japanese Yew

Japanese Yew is not found in pastures, but is one of the most toxic plants in Indiana. It is commonly found as ornamental shrub in residential landscaping. Most commonly, livestock ingest this plant is through trimmings. Usually a person, not knowing how toxic it is, feeds animals the trimmings of their shrubs thinking it's a special treat for the animals. Usually, toxicosis with this plant results in death due to cardiac arrest before the any other symptom occurs.

Nightshades

Nightshades contain a toxin similar to atropine. This toxin, solanine, causes the animal to salivate, be drowsy, weak and have dilated pupils. Toxicosis with Nightshades is not as deadly as other plants, but can be deadly if an animal consumes large quantities. Making hay with nightshades does not alter its toxicity. Forage that contains a large amount of Nightshades in it can be diluted with forage that does not contain Nightshades, but animals must still be monitored for signs of toxicosis.

White Snakeroot

White Snakeroot is typically found in wooded areas of pastures. The toxin in White Snakeroot causes muscle damage. In cattle, it causes muscle tremors and can be passed through a cow's milk her calf. In horses, it

causes weakness and throat paralysis. It can also damage the muscle of the heart of the animals.

Bracken Fern

Bracken Fern affects horses and cattle differently. Thiaminase causes a necessary vitamin, Thiamine, to be inactivated in the horse. The horse then usually displays neurological symptoms, including weakness in the rear legs or even paralysis. In cattle, a different toxin called Ptaquiloside causes bleeding throughout the body. It can also create tumors in the bladder which results in bloody urine. Making hay with Bracken Fern doesn't change the toxicity. In horses, thiamine can be given to treat bracken fern toxicosis.

Ragwort

Ragwort, which is found in early spring, causes liver failure. With liver failure, the animal will experience weight loss, fluid accumulation, and jaundice, or yellowing of the skin. It can also cause photosensitization, where white parts of the animal's skin will fall off when exposed to sunlight.

Water Hemlock

Water Hemlock grows in moist areas in pastures. The toxin in Water Hemlock causes rapid onset of convulsions that are very violent and result in death very quickly. The toxin is active in hay and in water where water hemlock plants have been trampled in.

Fescue

Certain varieties of Fescue have an endophyte, a fungus that lives between the plant's cells, that allows it to grow better. This

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endophyte, can cause problems in the animal by causing blood vessels to constrict. In horses, fescue toxicity causes the pregnancy of the mare to be abnormally long. The mare also does not produce milk. In cattle, fescue toxicity causes the foot to become gangrenous and fall off the animal during winter months. In horses, there is a medicine, Domperidone, to help with milk production.

This is not an all-inclusive list of poisonous plants that are found in Indiana pastures. Numerous other plants and trees can also cause problems in animals. Routine monitoring of your pastures or hay fields will help prevent toxicities from these and other plants.

For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact Dr. McDevitt. For more information on poisonous plants, contact your local Ag Extension Agent.

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