

## POISONOUS PLANTS FOR HORSES

Many of the common paddock weeds are poisonous to horses, but as most of them taste bad to the horse, he rarely eats them. Another factor that protects horses is their size--a 500kg animal has to consume a lot more of most toxins (poisons) than a smaller animal does to feel any effects.

However, some plants are so toxic that even a small nibble can be dangerous or because repeated browsing over weeks or months can lead to serious illness and death. The risk of poisoning is higher for young horses, who are more curious and like to try things they shouldn't, and for horses in very bare paddocks where the only thing left to eat is the weeds.

Poisonous plants are worth getting to know by sight -- not only so you can eliminate them from your paddocks, but also so that you can avoid them when out on the trail.



### RAGWORT

A yellow daisy like flowering plant which causes damage to the liver when grazed over a period of time.

Signs: Photosensitization, diminished appetite and weight loss, progressing to depression, incoordination and jaundice.

### PATTERSON'S CURSE

A purple-blue flowering plant which causes damage to the liver. Individual horses vary in their susceptibility, with some dying after a few weeks grazing Paterson's curse. Others may graze the weed for successive seasons before signs of poisoning appear.

Signs: Diminished appetite and weight loss, some horses show nervous signs such as head pressing, blindness and aimless walking.



### NIGHTSHADE

A fleshy plant when young but stems can get woody when older. It has small white flowers, followed by small green berries that turn black as they ripen.

Signs: colic like symptoms, loss of muscle control, disorientation, dilated pupils, death.

### BRACKEN FERN

Bracken fern is very common, out on the trail and in bush paddocks. Horses like to snatch a mouthful of fern while you're out riding. Bracken fern dried and baled into hay is still toxic. The individual leaves contain only a small amount of poison--horses must consume very large amounts to experience ill effects. However, bracken fern is unique among the toxic plants in that some horses like the taste of it and will seek it out.

Signs: loss of coordination, depressed heart rate, arrhythmia, weight loss, eventual death if not promptly treated



### BUTTERCUP

Yellow flowered buttercups are fleshy, low growing plants that prefer marshy, wet areas.

Horses will avoid eating buttercups when grass is available. After a hard frost or dried in hay, buttercups are no longer toxic.

Signs: Irritation of the mouth area, colic like symptoms, diarrhoea

### HEMLOCK

Hemlock is a fleshy plant with purple spots on its green stems and a small white multi headed flower. It grows in wet areas, especially on disturbed soil. It grows rapidly after Autumn rains. Handling the plant can cause dermatitis in some people.

Signs: dullness, loss of muscular power, stumbling and falling, nausea, dilation of pupils and complete paralysis. Symptoms may show as quickly as 12 minutes after the plant is eaten and death may occur in 2 to 3 hours.



### GARDEN PLANTS

Many common garden plants are also poisonous to horses. Some of the worst are Azaleas, Oleanders, Red Oaks and acorns and Red Maples.