

Poisonous Plants for Horses

Poisonous Plants Horses Should Steer Clear Of

When it comes to our equine friends, it's essential to keep an eye on what they munch on. Some plants can be incredibly harmful—sometimes even fatal—if horses get a taste for them. Think of notorious offenders like ragwort, sycamore, and acorns. Let's dive into the plants that pose a threat to our horses and what you can do to keep them safe.

The Usual Suspects

In the UK, the plants you want to watch out for include:

- **Ragwort**



- **Foxglove**



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Nightshade (both deadly and woody varieties)



- **Hemlock**



- **Buttercups**

And don't forget about the trees and shrubs:



- **Yew**



- **Sycamore**



- **Oak**

- **Laburnum**



- **Privet**



- **Laurel**



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Rhododendron

Familiarising yourself with these plants is crucial. Good pasture management and recognising the signs of poisoning in your horse can make all the difference. And remember, if you suspect your horse has nibbled on something toxic, don't hesitate—call your vet right away!

Common Poisonous Plants

Ragwort

This yellow-flowered plant may not seem appealing to horses when it's fresh, thanks to its bitter taste, but it becomes more tempting when wilted or dried. Just a small amount—around 1 to 5 kg over their lifetime—can lead to severe liver failure. Look out for symptoms like restlessness, lack of coordination, stomach pain, or even paralysis. Keeping your fields clear of ragwort is essential; removing it at the rosette stage is your best bet. Just a heads-up: wear gloves, as it can be harmful to humans too!

Foxglove

While horses typically avoid fresh foxglove, it's a different story when it appears in hay. Just 100 grams can be lethal. Keep an eye out for drooling, breathing difficulties, or seizures if you think your horse has ingested any.

Deadly Nightshade

Don't let the name fool you! Nightshade poisoning isn't usually fatal for horses, but that doesn't mean it's safe. Symptoms can include dilated pupils and muscle tremors, so contact your vet if you suspect poisoning.

Buttercups

Generally bitter, horses will often steer clear of fresh buttercups. But if they're in hay, they could pose a risk if consumed in large amounts. Signs to watch for include drooling and mouth blisters. If buttercups are a problem, consider a treatment plan for removal.

Hemlock

Typically not on a horse's menu, hemlock can be deadly if ingested. Look for symptoms like tremors, lack of coordination, or bloating, and contact your vet if you notice anything unusual.

Toxic Trees to Avoid

Sycamore, Maple, and Other Acers

These trees contain hypoglycin-A, which can cause severe muscle problems and even death in horses. Be especially vigilant in spring and autumn when seeds can blow into your fields. If you spot any, remove them immediately!

Oak Trees and Acorns

All parts of the oak tree can be harmful, but acorns are particularly enticing to horses. If consumed in large quantities, they can lead to colic and other serious digestive issues. In the fall, check your pastures regularly for falling acorns.

Yew

This common garden plant is highly toxic, and even a small amount can be fatal. Keep an eye out for muscle tremors and lack of coordination. Just 500 grams can do serious harm, so act quickly if you suspect ingestion.

Laburnum

All parts of the laburnum tree are poisonous, especially the seeds. While horses usually avoid this plant, it's often found in nearby gardens. Keep an eye out for symptoms like drowsiness and seizures.

Poisonous Shrubs

While most poisonous shrubs aren't common in pastures, it's good to be aware of what's around, especially if your fields border gardens.

- **Privet:** Be cautious of this common garden hedge. Symptoms of ingestion include stomach issues and paralysis.

- **Rhododendron and Laurel:** These are highly toxic even in small amounts and can severely affect a horse's respiratory system.



- **Bracken Ferns:** If bracken becomes a regular part of your horse's diet, it can lead to weight loss and tremors.

Preventing Poisoning

Good pasture management is key to keeping your horses safe:

- **Uproot Poisonous Plants:** Remove them before they go to seed, and wear protective gear while you do.
- **Spray Wisely:** Some plants may require spraying with a suitable herbicide. Just ensure horses are kept away until it's safe.
- **Fencing:** Keep poisonous trees and shrubs fenced off and trimmed back to prevent reach.
- **Check for Contaminants:** Be vigilant about ensuring your horses don't graze on plants creeping in from neighbouring gardens.



Recognising Signs of Poisoning

If your horse does consume something toxic, watch for these symptoms:

- Weight loss
- Lethargy or difficulty standing
- Sweating
- Muscle stiffness
- Dark urine
- Changes in bowel movements

Always contact your vet immediately if you notice any unusual behaviours. It's better to be safe than sorry!

In conclusion, keeping your horse safe from poisonous plants is all about vigilance and preparation. By knowing what to look out for and maintaining good pasture practices, you can help ensure your horse stays healthy and happy!