



## **TOXIC: Recognizing Poisonous Plants**

Knowing and being able to recognize what plants are toxic or hazardous to equines is an important skill for every horse owner. This list includes a few of the most common poisonous plants. For a complete list, visit

[http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/range/toxicplants\\_horses/Toxic%20Plant%20Database.html](http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/range/toxicplants_horses/Toxic%20Plant%20Database.html)



### 1) Johnson Grass:

Johnson Grass is a toxic weed that is common in the south. It is drought tolerant and often overgrazed when all the other grasses have been killed off due to dry conditions. It can also produce cyanide at certain times of the year. Overgrazing Johnson Grass can lead to neurological damage in all horses and to fetal damage in pregnant mares. Symptoms include

incoordination, dribbling urine, loss of control of back legs, constantly dropped penis, ataxia, and trouble backing. Nerve damage from Johnson Grass poisoning is irreversible and prognosis is poor. Inflammation of the kidneys and bladder caused by this weed can be treated if caught very early. Avoid feeding hays which include Johnson Grass or any other sorghum species of grass. They are all toxic if overgrazed. They are generally two feet tall, with wide blades and large heads with grains, and mildly hairy. Make sure to control such species in your pastures.

### 2) Red Maple:



Although pretty, the red maple is toxic to horses and should not be planted where curious eaters may be able to reach it. Healthy leaves seem to be safe, but wilted leaves that have fallen from these trees are extremely toxic, and fatal for an equine. Many horses enjoy eating leaves, and few of these will hesitate to eat red maple leaves. The gallic acid in these leaves is the toxic agent, and it

increases in levels in the summer. Horses often die within 18-24 hours of eating the leaves due to the lysis of red blood cells, causing major oxygen depletion. Those who do not die within this period exhibit dark red or brown urine, depression, colic, fever, and laminitis.

### 3) Oak



Oak trees are also very common. Unfortunately, many horses seem to enjoy eating acorns, and many owners do not know that they are harmful. Some evidence suggests that horses can even develop what resembles an addiction to acorns, seeking them out and eating them to the point of illness. Green acorns are the most toxic, although all acorns, leaves, and branches are also dangerous to ingest. Poisoning from oak can be fatal. Gallic acid is also a toxic agent in this plant, as well as tannic acid. Symptoms include constipation, colic, bloody or dark urine, weight loss, swelling of the hind legs, kidney problems, and dehydration. There is no antidote, although charcoal can help absorb toxins if given immediately after secretion. IV therapy can help prevent renal failure.



#### 4) False Dandelion (Flatweed, Spotted Catsear, Common Catsear):

This plant is the cause of a common type of Stringhalt known as Australian Stringhalt, which is most common in Australia and the United States. This neurological disease is easily recognized by its hallmark symptom, the exaggerated high lifting of the horse's hind legs when walking. This can be so dramatic that the horse kicks himself in the abdomen. Other symptoms include shivering, signs of a stringhalt-like gait in the forelimbs,

a hoarse, roar-like whinny, and increased lifting of the hindlegs when backing or turning. The neurotoxin in the plant targets the nerve fibers of the hindlegs and larynx, causing these symptoms. Horses should be removed from their pasture as soon as symptoms present. Recovery takes from weeks to years, depending on the duration of the ingestion of the plant and the severity of symptoms. Horses which demonstrate forelimb symptoms take the longest to recover.

#### 5) Buttercup (Crowfoot, Figwort):



These common flowers are often seen in pastures. They are also poisonous to dogs, cats, and humans. Symptoms of buttercup poisoning include blisters on the mouth, lips, or nose, swelling of these areas, drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, weakness, tremors, bloody urine, and, in severe cases,

paralysis. Symptoms may not be seen until 1-2 days after ingestion. The plant is most common in overgrazed pastures and the flower is the most toxic part. The toxin it produces when chewed or crushed damages the victim's gastrointestinal tract.