

Factsheet: Poisonous Plants

A variety of plants, trees and hedges are poisonous to horses and this fact sheet highlights some of the most important ones found in the UK.



Clinical signs of poisoning:

- Increased respiratory rate
- Colic
- Excessive salivation
- Dilated pupils
- Head pressing
- Diarrhoea
- Anorexia
- Muscle tremors
- Ataxia

Many plant poisons accumulate in the horse's body over time so clinical signs will not be seen immediately after ingestion. Therefore, if you are concerned your horse has been eating poisonous plants then you should seek veterinary assistance straight away.

What to do if you find a poisonous plant:

Pull it up by the root, remove from the field and ideally burn the plant
Some poisonous plants such as buttercups may only be eradicated by spraying with suitable herbicides. Seek professional advice before using herbicides and it is important to note that there will be a period of time before it is safe to graze the horses on the paddock again after spraying

Fence off any trees or hedges to prevent access



Ragwort



Ragwort poisoning is extremely serious for horses and if enough is consumed over time it will cause liver failure and death. Dried ragwort is also poisonous and hay should not be made from fields containing ragwort.

Ragwort is required to be controlled by law under; The Weeds Act 1959 and the Ragwort Act 2003 and government authorities can serve clearance notices to the owners or occupiers of land containing ragwort.

Foxglove



Horses won't normally eat fresh foxglove but it can be palatable in hay and just 100g could prove fatal after only a few hours. It causes cardiac arrhythmias and can result in sudden death.

Deadly Nightshade



Horses tend to avoid this plant as it is not very palatable and ingestion is not normally fatal but can it cause drowsiness, pupil dilation and seizures.

Buttercups



Large amounts of fresh buttercups can be poisonous and cause excessive salivation, diarrhoea or colic. dried buttercups are harmless in hay. Seek professional advice on spraying.



Oak (acorns)



Acorns consumed in large quantities can cause severe colic, diarrhoea and kidney failure. It is important to fence off oak trees and remove all acorns from the pasture in the autumn or move horses to alternative grazing.

Yew



Yew trees are exceptionally toxic to horses and can cause acute cardiac arrest. There is no treatment. Both fresh leaves and fallen leaves and berries are toxic so ensure horses have no access to either.

Privet



Privet is a common ornamental hedge in gardens and when consumed it can cause colic, seizures and death. It is extremely important all privet hedge is fenced off.

Rhododendron



All parts of the Rhododendron plant are poisonous to the horses and ingestion can cause excessive salivation, colic and cardiac arrhythmias. Horses should be completely fenced off from all plants.



Sycamore



Sycamore seeds 'helicopters' or samaras contain a toxin called hypoglycin A which prevents energy being produced within muscle cells causing the cells to die and results in the disease **atypical myopathy**. Sadly, even with fast intensive treatment many horses die. If your horse shows any of the following clinical signs call your vet immediately: muscular stiffness, reluctance to walk, muscle tremors, sweating, depression, difficulty breathing or dark brown/ red tinged urine.

It is essential to prevent access to seeds and samaras. Ideally do not graze horses on pasture with sycamore trees but if this is not possible then set up large perimeter fencing around the sycamore tree, as the seeds can spread very large distances and remove fallen seedlings daily.

It is also a good idea to provide extra forage especially where pasture is poor or grazing is tight.

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