

Horses Land Water

Improving the health of horses and the environment

TOXICITY

Weeds • Pasture grasses

TOXIC PLANTS

When plants containing toxins are ingested over a long period of time or in large quantities it can result in horses being poisoned. Grazing particular weeds and pasture plants can, in certain circumstances, result in their death. Horses are especially susceptible to Salvation Jane toxins but can also be poisoned by heliotrope, ragwort, St. John's wort, Cape Tulip, variegated thistle, bracken fern and others. Even pasture plants such as annual ryegrass, perennial ryegrass and phalaris can either themselves be toxic or can carry microbiological poisons.

Common causes of toxic poisoning

- Salvation Jane or Patterson's Curse (pyrrolizidine alkaloids).
- Common heliotrope (pyrrolizidine alkaloids).
- Capeweed (nitrate poisoning).
- Perennial ryegrass (endophyte alkaloid toxin).
- Annual ryegrass (bacterial and nematode-induced toxin).
- Plants or water containing high levels of lead, arsenic compounds, cadmium, copper, molybdenum, selenium compounds, fluorine and inorganic nitrogen compounds.
- Highly saline water (over 7,000 ppm)

Note: Numerous other plants (including many common garden plants) and substances can be toxic. Seek professional advice.



Salvation Jane

Symptoms

- Pronounced staggering.
- Awkward stance.
- Pronounced salivation.
- Uncoordinated movement.
- Muscular tremors.
- Convulsive seizures.
- Tetanic spasms.
- Sudden death.



Cape Tulip

In the case of Salvation Jane poisoning the toxin interferes with the liver's function. The onset of the disease may occur within a few weeks to several years, depending on the amount ingested and the grazing period. Over time the horse will lack appetite, lose weight and the coat will become unkempt. It may yawn repeatedly, become listless and stand with a lowered head.

In advanced cases the animal will lose co-ordination, show signs of photosensitivity and ultimately go into a coma and die.

Note: Not all of the above symptoms will necessarily be exhibited by individual animals. For a professional diagnosis contact your local veterinarian.

Adopt an integrated approach to weed control.

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What to do if toxic poisoning is suspected

- Contact your veterinarian.
- Keep animals as quiet as possible.
- Try to determine which plants are responsible.
- Remove animals showing symptoms of toxicity to a clean holding paddock, yard or stable.

Land management

- Identify 'good' pasture plants.
- Identify 'bad' plants (weeds) in your pastures.
- Implement an integrated weed control program.
- Avoid overgrazing.
- Sow a mixture of pasture species and cultivars to avoid one type of plant dominating.
- If sowing pastures use low endophyte cultivars of perennial ryegrass.
- To prevent spread of weeds, ensure machinery, seed, fodder and livestock are free of contaminants before they enter the property.
- New livestock brought on to the property should be held in a restricted area for at least four days to allow seeds to pass through animals.



Capeweed

Top Tip

Each year, review your weed control program. Each season, monitor weeds present and numbers of weeds in pasture paddocks. Look at how successful or otherwise your weed control program has been and modify the program accordingly.

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