

# Toxic Plants

## Recent Farm Animal Poisonings

### Central Florida

Join University of Florida Livestock/Natural Resources Agent Dennis Mudge on any of the over two hundred farm visits he makes annually, and you will quickly value IFAS and what the County Extension Agents do for farmers.

On-site pasture visits reveal to animal owners dangerous weeds that frequent their animal's grazing areas. Dennis has found that "the average farm or ranch has six to fourteen weeds that they need to become very aware of. They have the potential to make farm animals ill and even cause death when ignored." Control of these weeds is very important for your animal's safety. Identifying poisonous plants is a learned skill that is the responsibility of all animal owners.

### Observational Study

**Horses:** Even the best managed horse farm must include observing opportunistic weeds and dangerous trees. Horse ranches grazing up to wetlands or wood lots especially need to take care.

Recent poisonings have come from American Poke weed. This is a weed that seems to appear over night and often causes gastrointestinal problems including colic, but does occasionally cause death.

Hemlock kills horses every year due to the seriousness of its toxicity. Common in Florida, it is often along fence lines and next to stables.

Bracken Fern must be mentioned in that horses will actually seek it out when they develop a taste for it. Common in Florida wetlands, when present in large amounts it is a serious concern to many. A pasture up to the front door is unwise; ornamentals are often toxic.



Pokeweed



Poison Hemlock



Spotted Hemlock



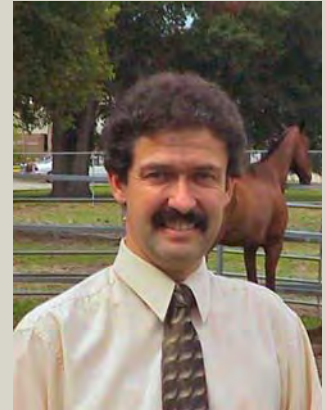
Bracken Fern



Oleander

### Farm/Ranch Case Studies Series

Fact Sheet  
#032710



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Livestock/Natural Resources/Public Policy

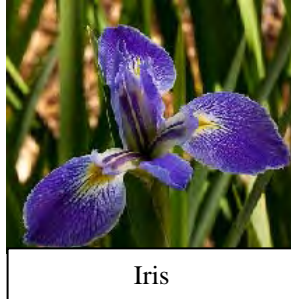
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**Cattle:** Lantana kills cattle every year. This plant is very difficult to kill but diagnosis is often easy. Yet cattle experience discomfort and die each year from it.

Wet areas always propose a threat to cattle in that many weeds in these areas are poisonous. Left alone for most of the year, cattle can get in trouble when spending too much time looking for “green feed” or trying to “cool off” in the water. Iris, lilies and horsetail have all killed cattle recently.

When cattle travel daily through wooded areas to reach nearby pastures, care will need to be taken. If they stop to feed, woodland greenery can kill them. Recent poisonings have occurred with Coral ardisia and Coffee senna.



**Goats:** We say that goats can “eat anything”... they are “browsers” and are “tough.” Goats too can be killed by toxic plants if they are allowed to eat them. Recent poisonings have occurred from Black Oak, Cherry Laurel, Yellow Jasmine, and Pin Cherry.

A poor practice is to cut off tree branches and throw them to your goats. Goats can clean out areas by picking and choosing what and how they eat. But a farmer who gives toxic trees to his goats as the only food that day will quickly learn how fast he or she can kill them. Jasmine is a vine that is toxic and some varieties are extremely toxic.



**Poultry:** "Free ranging" poultry is a recent phenomenon in Florida which is, of course, just a return to by-gone practices. If your free ranging poultry escapes the predators, they may not the toxic plants.

Recent poisonings have occurred from poultry eating toxic seeds from Bladderpod, Jimson weed and Sesbania.



Bladderpod



Jimson weed



Sesbania

**Rabbits:** Rabbits allowed to roam a yard or farm yard may also graze on toxic plants. Recently poisonings have occurred with crotons.

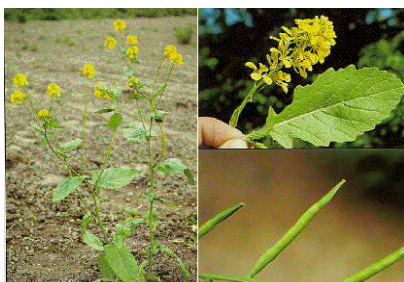


Croton



Sago Palm

**Farm Dogs:** Each year dogs are killed by eating the fruiting flower portion of the sago palm. This is an awful smelling part of the plant, but will kill a dog quickly if he or she devours it.



Mustard



Burdock



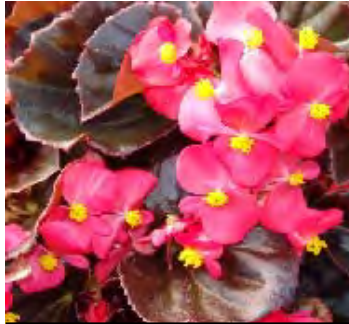
Poison Sumac

**Even hay** is not always safe and northern hay needs to be examined also. Burdock and poison sumac dried in hay will kill any animal.

**Cats:** Cats eat grass commonly to help them regurgitate hairballs. If shut up inside, they will attempt to do the same with house plants. It may work or it may kill them. Recent poisonings have occurred with English Ivy, begonias and asparagus fern.



English Ivy



Begonia



Asparagus Fern

**All Animals and Children:** Each year Dennis makes farm visits where animals have died from the following plants: Nightshade, Sicklepod, Chinese Tallow, and butterfly plants like Milkweed, Crotalaria and Cassia. While Nightshade and Sicklepod are weeds that commonly occur, the butterfly plant weeds are escapees from your neighbor's yard.

Their control is very important. Ignoring them could kill your animals. Any farm animal, pet or child can die from eating plants provided for butterflies.



Nightshade



Chinese Tallow



Crotalaria



Cassia



Sicklepod



Milkweed