

Grazing and Ground Ivy

Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group

We own 13 acres of grassland paddocks which we started grazing early 2005. In March 2005 all four of my horses suffered secondary photosensitivity, not primary. This means they had eaten something toxic which had affected the liver. One horse had a biopsy which ruled out Ragwort and St Johns Wort, which didn't surprise me as we didn't have any in the field.

We still have not got to the route of the problem, one possibility is Mycotoxins, which we are now dealing with through grassland management. However, I did notice last year we had ground ivy, but my vet and agronomist dismissed this as the problem. Having looked on various websites it does appear to contain an irritant oil which can be toxic to horses.

Have you or your colleagues ever come across this being a problem with livestock. I would be very interested to hear from you.

Stacey
Stacey Howlett

there was something a few months ago about ground ivy and grazing animals on the discussion group (I think) can you recall what the solution if any was?

Lois

My appalling memory was that it was about ivy from fallen trees and not ground ivy and the consensus was that it was an astringent and so mildly poisonous but never killed anything and often stock will eat it for choice and never seemed to come to any harm. It is sometimes used for medicinal purposes but I cannot remember what for, maybe constipation but maybe also for something more serious as well.

Maybe someone who is whole witted and not half witted can remember the problem it solved.

We have daffodils starting to shoot here but the frogs have not laid their spawn yet. Does this harbinger some hard weather to come ?

Richard

I can't comment on any toxicity levels with regard to horses, but it has been used to make a sleep inducing drink for humans. Prolonged exposure to it (for example surveying flora in a W1 woodland) does lead a soporific effect in my experience.

Henry

There was much discussion about the potentially toxic effects of ivy, in November/December 2005. I cannot recall - or find any record of - previous discussions about ground ivy.

Ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) is included in the old MAFF publication, 'Poisonous Plants in Britain and their effects on Animals and Man' (Cooper & Johnson, 1984) - which I have made reference to on previous occasions. Information gleaned from this is given below:

- in common with other species of the family Labiatae, *G. hederacea* contains poorly characterised oils and a bitter substance

- it does not appear to have caused poisoning in Britain (not before 1984, at least), but
- illness and death among horses and cattle have been reported in Eastern Europe...

Seven horses fed with freshly cut lucerne from a field where clumps of *G. hederacea* were growing "developed an accelerated weak pulse, difficulty in breathing, conjunctival haemorrhage, elevated temperature and dizziness. Post-mortem examination of one old horse which died revealed enlargement of the spleen, dilation of the caecum and gastroenteritis. The disease was reproduced experimentally by feeding fresh or slightly wilted ground ivy to other horses."

"Poisoning in cattle was also recorded."

"In another outbreak, horses given freshly mown lucerne containing a high proportion of *Glechoma* developed forced, rapid breathing, and 15% mortality was recorded. There was dilation of the air spaces in the lungs. With a change of feed and symptomatic treatment the other animals recovered."

I hope that this is of some help, although the effects and symptoms do not sound like those experienced by Stacey's horses.

Regards,

Chris Britt
ADAS

I'm no expert on the toxic effects of Ground Ivy, but from my own observations I have found that my Dexter cattle seem to search out and ingest large quantities of ivy with no ill effects. Indeed, a local farmer recommended that I fed ivy to a sick steer, suggesting that it has positive effects on their digestion. I hope I'm not inadvertently poisoning my animals, but it would be nigh on impossible to isolate them from ivy from the sites they're grazing.
No name given

We seem to be in danger of confusing Ivy and Ground Ivy. These are two completely different species, from different plant families, and there is no reason at all to think that they might share any properties at all in terms of potential toxicity. This illustrates the kind of reason why scientists prefer to use latin names, for which we often get accused of arrogance, esotericism, conceit etc etc. -- all justified in many circumstances, no doubt!

Apart from this I have nothing to contribute as I know nothing about the toxicity of either Ivy or Ground Ivy.

Francis
