

Grazing and Box

Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group

Hi -

I had always thought box was highly poisonous, but the various web pages I found all say it's not too bad. We have no sites with box, but I've just asked some of our animals what they think about it...

I offered a sprig of freshly cut box (from a 1 m tall bush in the garden) to four of our animals. The bull ate a mouthful, a cow would not try it (but gave it a good sniff), and two horses ate a nibble each. After the first try, none of them would eat any more -- which is just what you'd expect for a plant they'd not encountered before.

I shall now wait a few days then try them again and let you know what their verdict is. If they are still alive.

I also looked up cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), which our cattle eat with great enthusiasm. As far as I can work out, about 1 kg of fresh leaves ought to contain a lethal dose of cyanide for a bovine. I've stood and watched a cow eat nearly this much, off a bush which is hard-browsed up as high as they can reach (higher recently, because it bent down in the snow). So you never can tell, even with cyanide, which as I recall is fundamentally toxic to all living things... (<http://www.emea.eu.int/pdfs/vet/mrls/067599en.pdf>).

Have you considered selling the box timber? Box was a traditional wood for cogs, combs, printing blocks etc (and boxes?), because it is hard and has an extremely fine grain. Probably why it was widely planted. Surely someone must still use traditional methods for some of these? Also for turning.

Richard

Update on box experiment:

All animals still alive and well after 6 days...

I tried the same four animals again with sprays of box -- and one more horse has added herself to the experiment.

- None of the three animals who tasted it before (two horses and the bull) would eat it again. One horse mouthed it but then dropped it.
- The cow who would not try it before ate the whole spray.
- A new third horse had a nibble.

So far this seems to indicate that these animals are not keen. I will try all five again in a few more days.

Perhaps you will need goats or sheep...

Richard

Contrary to what I found on various other web pages, this one says it is highly poisonous to stock: <http://www.provet.co.uk/lorgue/> (click on "B", then Box).

Toxic dose of leaves as little as 300g for cattle.

Don't think I gave them that much...

Richard
