

**Ag Article**  
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## **Poisonous Plants and Livestock**

Recently, I have had two beef producers with poison hemlock in their pasture. This weed resembles wild carrot with a fine lace-like leaf and a carrot-like root. The differences are the stem is hollow and has purple spots on the outside.

We will likely remember March and April of 2016 as very dry. Most livestock producers are still feeding hay as of April 23. Grass just hasn't taken off like we would normally expect.

The combination of poisonous plants and dry weather is a dangerous combination for livestock. When pasture is limited, livestock may be more tempted to graze plants they would normally avoid. Our pastures are currently at very low levels due to earlier cold weather and the lack of moisture during March and April.

Livestock rarely consume these deadly weeds when there is adequate pasture available. In a drought situation, cattle will experiment with plants in search of nutrition. Livestock on pastures consisting mainly of poor quality forage may also be more likely to try poisonous plants.

Several common poisonous plants in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia include nightshade, buttercup, jimsonweed, Japanese yew, laurels, azaleas, rhododendrons, purple or parilla mint, wild cherry, poison hemlock and red maple. A good website for identifying poisonous plants is the Cornell University site, <http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html>. The site also has links to other great sites on poisonous plants databases in Pennsylvania, Indiana and Illinois.

Make sure cattle have adequate desirable forage. When turning animals into a field in the spring, make sure they have been fed. Call the veterinarian if you are in doubt about a possible animal poisoning.

Incidents of livestock poisoning can be minimized by paying closer attention to our pastures in times of drought and watching cattle for signs of health problems. Good pasture management and weed control will help minimize toxic weeds in pastures and hayfields. You should be aware of poisonous weeds common to the area. Your local extension office can help with the identification of potentially poisonous weeds.