



GREEN LIGHT FOR SPRING GRAZING

SHOULD BE YELLOW FOR CAUTION

Ensure larkspur, lupine, halogeton, deathcamas not predominate in livestock diet as pastures green up

By Jessica Crowder

As we see spring snows and warm days, we also see plant growth begin. Spring green up is often exciting to landowners who are ready to finish winter feeding and let animals out to pasture. However, there are threats to livestock health out there. Some common threats are larkspur (*Delphinium* spp.), lupine (*Lupinus* spp.), halogeton (*Halogeton glomeratus*), and deathcamas (*Zigadenus* spp.).

Larkspur is a native perennial forb that has bright blue flowers with a distinct spur pointing backward.

There are several species in Wyoming. All are poisonous.

Cattle are most susceptible to larkspur poisoning, although horses and sheep can be affected.

Alkaloids are the toxins, and a lethal dosage ranges between 0.5 percent and 3 percent of an animal's body weight.

Death can result from respiratory failure.

Symptoms may include nervousness, stiffness, staggering, and falling followed by excessive salivation and frequent swallowing.

Larkspur blooms in spring – the time of greatest danger for poisoning. Landowners should be able to identify larkspur before turn out and then develop a grazing plan to account for infested areas. Cattle losses can be reduced by keeping cattle off large, densely populated areas until after the plants have flowered. Grazing sheep before cattle may also help to protect the cattle since sheep generally select forbs first and will eat the larkspur down. They are less susceptible than cattle to poisoning from larkspur.

Lupine is another pretty wildflower that contains poisonous alkaloids. There are several native species of lupine in Wyoming.

The plant has white to blue flowers and palmate leaves (leaflets come out of a point in the center of the leaf like fingers from the palm of a hand).

Pods look similar to pea pods, and the leaves are often hairy.

Not every species of lupine is poisonous but, if unsure about a specific species on your property, precaution should be taken with all livestock.

Sheep and cattle are susceptible.

Cows that eat lupine during early pregnancy often have calves with birth defects, sometimes called "crooked calf disease." Other symptoms may include excessive salivation, lethargy, difficulty breathing, convulsions, and twitching leg muscles.



Lupine



Deathcamas



Larkspur



Halogeton

Small doses of lupine eaten every now and then are not usually poisonous to livestock, but large quantities at once or smaller quantities several consecutive days are poisonous. To prevent livestock poisoning, ensure animals have alternate, more desirable food sources during the growing season. This may include supplemental feeding in some instances.

Halogeton is an introduced annual forb with small, fleshy leaves often found in disturbed areas and on alkaline soils.

Sheep are most susceptible to poisoning, but cattle can be affected.

Halogeton produces toxic oxalates that, if ingested, can cause kidney failure.

Symptoms include staggering and muscle spasms.

Prevention includes making certain animals have higher-quality forage available. Often, livestock will not consume halogeton if better forage is available. Halogeton often grows in disturbed areas, such as

trails and corrals. Make sure livestock are in good condition when entering these areas. Animals in good health are less likely to consume lethal doses as they tend to be more choosy about what they eat and tend to avoid less desirable plants, such as halogeton, in favor of more desirable ones, such as grasses, etc.

One of the deadliest native plants in Wyoming is **deathcamas**. There are several species, and they are similar in appearance. Deathcamas is a perennial with grass-like leaves, white to yellowish flowers, and bulbous roots. In Wyoming, deathcamas is usually found on sandy soils but can be found elsewhere.

These plants contain a poisonous alkaloid at all growth stages.

When consumed, alkaloids can cause cardiac failure resulting in death. A lethal dose ranges for 0.6 to 6 percent of an animal's body weight.

If an animal is less affected, symptoms may include salivation, vomiting, muscle weakness, labored breathing, convulsions, and coma.

Deathcamas emerges and greens up early in the spring, making it appear delicious and nutritious to sheep, cattle, and horses. Sheep are more likely to consume deathcamas as they often select forb species over grasses. However, deathcamas is poisonous to all livestock and humans throughout the year. Deathcamas matures quickly and disappears as it enters dormancy during summer. There is no known treatment.

If deathcamas is present, landowners must ensure animals are provided alternate, high-quality forage during the spring. If large amounts of deathcamas are present, finding an alternate pasture for grazing until the plant begins to go dormant may be worthwhile.

As plants begin to appear this spring and livestock grazing occurs, proper management of your acreage and livestock can spare you from losses.

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