

RAGWORT

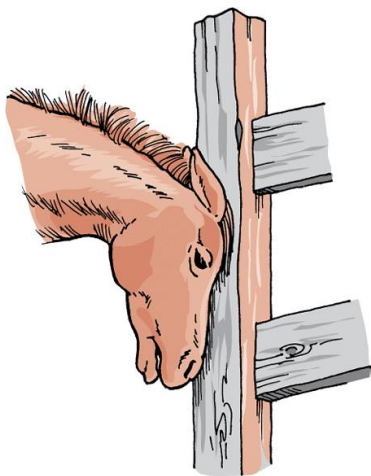
Jacobaea vulgaris aka common ragwort, stinking willie, tansy ragwort, benweed, St. James-wort, ragweed, stinking nanny/ninny/willy, staggerwort, dog standard, cankerwort, stammerwort, mare's fart and cushag.

What happens if my horses eats it?

Ragwort poisons horses by destroying the liver cells. This can happen all at once when a lot is eaten in a short space of time, or this can happen gradually, sometimes over years when little bits are eaten here and there. A study has shown that as little as 0.15-0.5kg eaten daily for only 60 days was enough to be fatal. While it is true that fresh ragwort is not appealing to horses, when grass is getting low towards the end of summer, it becomes more tempting to them. When the plant is dead, it loses its bitter taste and horses will happily eat it. But it is no less poisonous dead than alive. There is a big risk to horses when ragwort is present in the hay or haylage for this reason. It is often difficult to spot once dried.



Liver failure due to ragwort poisoning is almost always fatal. By the time symptoms are shown, the damage is usually beyond repair.



What do I need to look for in my horse?

The symptoms are initially very mild and can go unnoticed. Often the horse will just look poor, dull coat, not holding weight no matter what they are fed. Lethargy and depression quickly follow. Sometimes jaundice will be visible on the gums and whites of the eyes, but not always. Once the brain becomes affected, the horse will start yawning excessively, head rubbing/pressing and eventually their personality will change. They can appear to go blind and even become highly aggressive. Next they become very weak and seem to lose their balance until eventually they can't get up.

How do I get rid of it?

Trying to remove ragwort from fields can be tedious and unrewarding. Ragwort is usually lifted out with special forks by the roots. If this is done before the plant flowers, it is very successful at getting rid of ragwort. However after flowering, which is when owners usually notice it, this act spreads the seeds and makes matters worse for the following years.





For easier control of ragwort, initially section off the area of the field you wish to treat so the horses cannot graze it. Use a weed killer/herbicide that will kill the plants including the seeds and roots. Ideally a product that doesn't kill grass and will not hang around in the ground for too long. For a safe, highly successful and specific herbicide try Citronella e.g. Barrier H from Progreen

(<https://www.progreen.co.uk/barrier-h-5-l>). Avoid applying just before rainfall. After 48-72 hours the dead plant can be removed. There is no need to lift the root but all of the plant

that could be eaten must be taken up. If the spray has only been used on the ragwort plants, the horses can be allowed to graze the area again while you do the next section. If any new plants are quickly given the same treatment as they pop up, the ragwort will very easily be brought under control.

Always remember to wear long sleeves and gloves when dealing with ragwort. It is poisonous to humans too. Although much less so by touch than by eating. Some people do have allergies to ragwort so please take sensible precautions for your own health too.

Don't forget verges that border your fields as these can harbour ragwort, and talk with owners of any neighbouring fields about doing the same.

If you have any concerns that your horse could be suffering from ragwort poisoning, ring us at the office for a visit on 01204 668108.