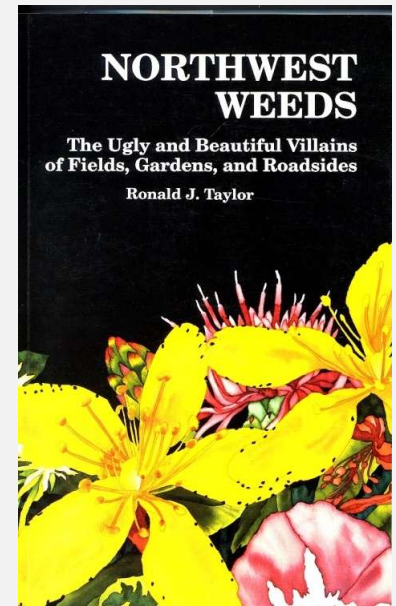
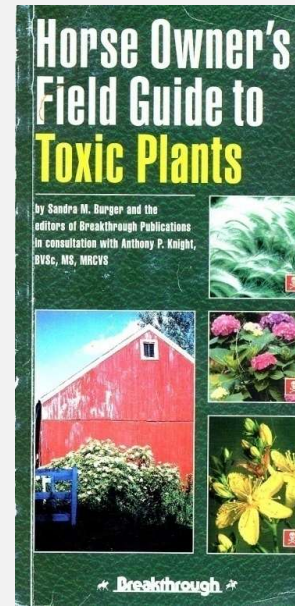
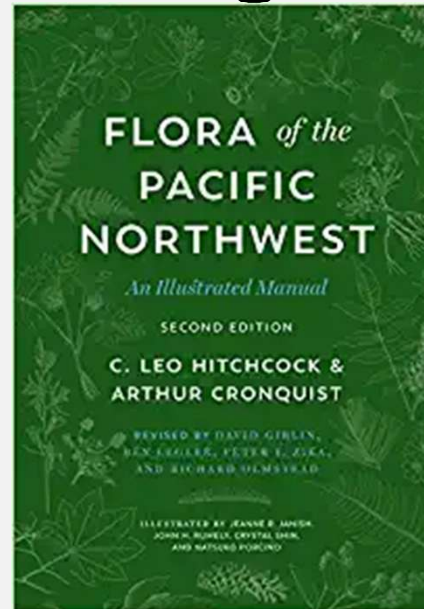
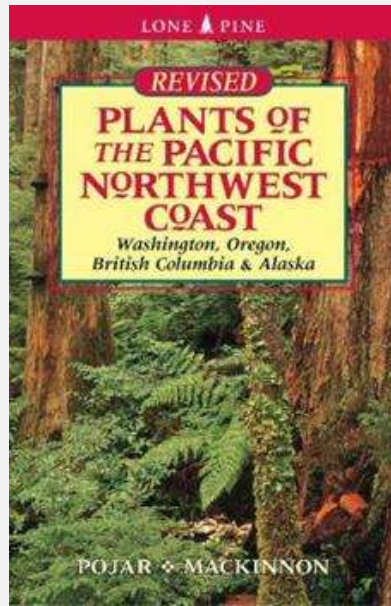
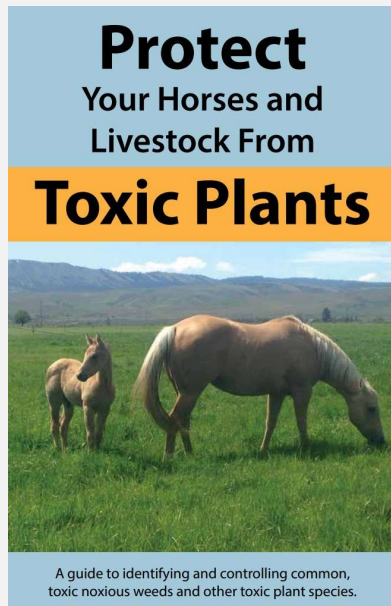


Poisonous Plants for Horses



Presented by Christina St John
Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board
Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, Peninsula Chapter
June 18, 2025

Make sure to know what your horse is touching or eating!!!



This presentation doesn't cover all poisonous plants found on the Olympic Peninsula. Make sure to use a good field guide when encountering unknown plants and work with your vet to determine poisoning symptoms.

Types of Symptoms

- Minor
 - Upset stomach
 - Rashes
 - Vomiting
 - Mouth and throat pain
- Major
 - Severe skin or eye irritation
 - Convulsions
 - Organ failure
 - Birth defects
 - Coma
 - Death



Eating common St. Johnswort in amounts exceeding 1% of their body weight causes extreme photosensitivity in cattle.

Photo credit © Vet in Training



Now to the plants...

Can anyone spot the poisonous
plant in this picture?



Now to the plants...

Can anyone spot the poisonous plant in this picture?

Poison hemlock (poisonous)
growing in burr chervil (edible)

Poison Hemlock

(*Conium maculatum*)

- Required for control in Clallam and Jefferson Counties
- Carrot family – white flat flowers, feathery leaves
 - Biennial
 - **No hairs on plant**
 - Purple blotches on stem (sometimes)
- Every part of plant is poisonous
 - Toxicity increases during growing season
 - Poisonous when dried



Hemlock stalks with (left) and without (right) purple blotches



Can form dense carpets



Even little plants have huge root systems



Poison hemlock seedlings kind of look like cilantro



Can grow up to 12 feet tall

Poison hemlock vs. Lookalikes

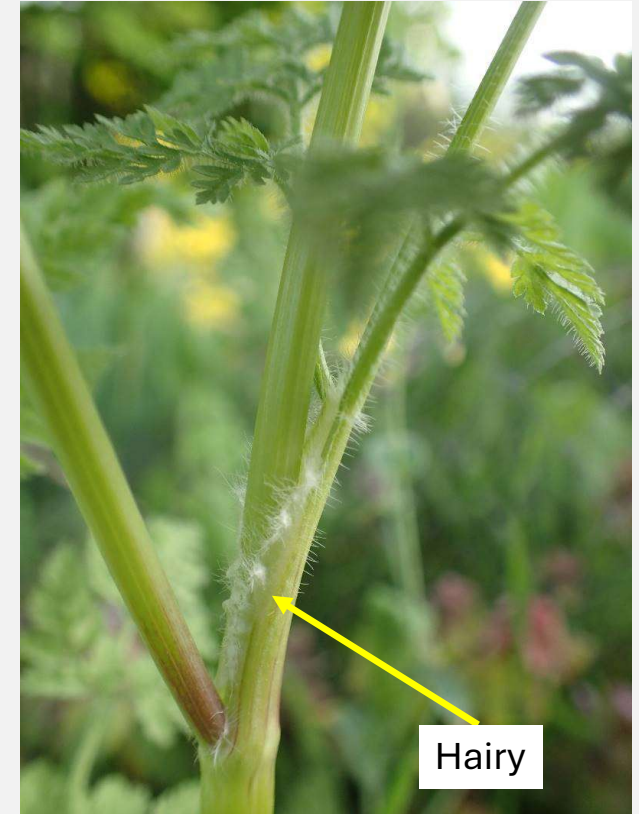
Look for the hairs!



Poison hemlock – no hairs
anywhere on plant



Wild carrot – hairy stems and leaves



Burr chervil – hair in leaf axils, on
leaves, scattered hairs on stems

Western Water Hemlock

(Cicuta douglasii)

- Native
- Carrot family
 - White flat-top flowers
 - Dissected leaves
- Root stalks have hollow chambers
- Fleshy tubers
- Grows in wet meadows and pastures
- Most toxic plant in North America
 - One mouthful is enough to kill
 - Attacks central nervous system



Photo credits © Craig Althen



First year rosette



Tansy ragwort

(Jacobaea vulgaris)

- Required for control in Clallam and Jefferson Counties
- All parts of plants are poisonous, but flowerheads contain the most poison
- Toxic when dried and becomes more palatable
- Consumption over time causes irreversible liver damage
- Biennial
- Yellow flowers, fluffy seeds
- Prefers disturbed fields, roadsides, pastures

Common St John'swort

(*Hypericum perforatum*)

- Can be confused with tansy ragwort
- All parts of plant are toxic
 - Remains toxic when dried
- Small clear or black holes in leaves
- Can cause photosensitivity, skin blisters, especially in lighter-skinned animals



Photos from Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board

Common tansy

(*Tanacetum vulgare*)



- Required for control in Clallam and Jefferson Counties
- Rhizomatous perennial
- Strong smell
- Fern-like leaves
- Yellow button flowers
- Right-of-ways, pastures, streambanks, meadows
- Uncommonly grazed by horses and livestock because of strong odor
 - Neural and cardiac issues



Hoary alyssum

(*Berteroa incana*)

- Control required in Clallam and Jefferson Counties
- Winter annual or biennial
- White flowers with notch in petal; round seed heads
- Found in the Carlsborg area; also in eastern WA
- All plant parts toxic
 - Still toxic when dried



Purple foxglove

(*Digitalis purpurea*)

- Invasive weed
- Biennial/short lived perennial
- 1st year – basal rosette of hairy leaves
- Stalk of bell-shaped flowers
 - Purple, pink or white
 - Spotted
- Sunny, disturbed areas
- Poison found in flowers, leaves, stems and seeds
- Affects heartbeat and blood pressure



Bracken Fern

(Pteridium aquilinum)

- Ranges in size, depending on soil moisture and fertility
- Rarely eaten – usually unpalatable, but can develop taste for it
 - Still toxic in hay
 - Large amounts need to be eaten
- Neural dysfunction
 - Uncoordinated, depressed, wide stance

Buttercups

(*Ranunculus* spp.)

- Most common – creeping buttercup
 - Low growing perennial that spreads by seeds, stolons and root fragments
- Meadow buttercup – taller flowers
- 5 yellow petals that looks oily/buttery
- All plants toxic, but requires large amounts
- Bitter taste, but some animals can develop cravings
- Inflammation, gastric issues, depression



Photo credit King County Noxious Weed Control Board

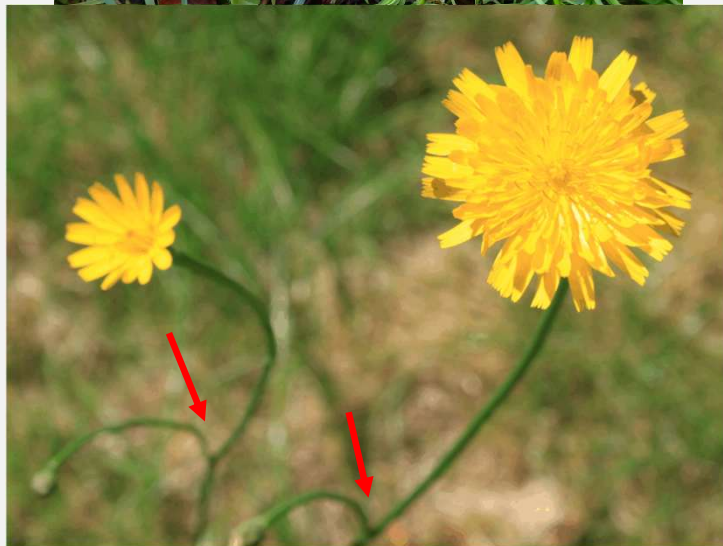


Photo credit © David Giblin



Photo credit © David Giblin





Flower stems can be branched
(Photo from Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board)

Hairy cat's-ear

(*Hypochaeris radicata*)

- Aggressive weed in lawns, pastures, waste areas
- Basal rosette with hairy leaves
 - Smaller, rounder lobes on leaf than dandelion
- Yellow flower on leafless stalk
 - Stem can be branched – different than dandelion
- Reproduces by seeds, crown and root fragments
- Toxic to horses – causes Australian stringhalt disease

Grasses

- Grass awns and seeds can get lodged into mouth or stuck in digestive track
- Grasses to watch for:
 - Cheatgrass (downy brome)
 - Ripgut brome
 - Medusahead
 - Foxtail barley



Foxtail barley
Photo Credit © Craig Althen

Other plants to be on the lookout for...

Toxic

- Mustards
- Lupines
- Horsetail
- Horseweed
- Common groundsel
- Kochia (control required)
- Russian knapweed (control required)
- Scotch broom
- Fiddleneck
- Milk thistle (control required)

Unpalatable

- Knapweeds (control required)
- Common teasel (control required)
- Oxeye daisy
- Wild chervil (control required)
- Bull thistle
- Scotch thistle (control required)
- Hairy whitetop

If you have a weed in your pasture and you're not sure what it is... Contact your local Noxious Weed Control Board!

Clallam County – Christina St John

360-417-2442

christina.stjohn@clallamcountywa.gov

Jefferson County – Sophie DeGroot

360-316-9332

sdegroot@co.Jefferson.wa.us

A photograph of a person standing in a field of tall, green plants with yellow flowers. The person is wearing a dark shirt and light-colored pants. The field is dense with these plants, and in the background, there is a line of trees under a clear blue sky. The image is split into two panels by a white text box in the center.

Questions?

Clallam County Noxious Weed Control Board
<https://www.clallamcountywa.gov/821/Noxious-Weed-Control>
360-417-2442
223 East 4th Street Suite 15
Port Angeles, WA 98362
Christina.stjohn@clallamcountywa.gov