

Other Weeds

Halogeton



Halogeton is an annual weed **poisonous to sheep and cattle**. Cattle and sheep are susceptible to intoxication and death from consumption of halogeton, but cases of large scale poisoning of cattle are rare compared to sheep. It becomes more toxic as the growing season advances, reaching a peak of toxicity at maturity. Livestock readily graze halogeton. Halogeton cannot compete with healthy range plants. Therefore, control involves keeping a healthy cover of desirable forage plants.

Is a small forb, growing 3 to 12 inches tall. Stems red when young, turning yellow to white with maturity. Stems are branched from base, spreading first, and then growing vertical. Its leaves alternate, simple, fleshy and tubular. Leaves are bluish-green and have a small hair at the end. Leaves resemble a small sausage with a sharp point. Flowers are small and inconspicuous, in leaf axils. Flowers July to September and reproduces from two types of seed: A black seed, with yellowish or reddish fan-like wings and similar to a snail coil, and a brown wingless seed. The black seed germinates quickly, and the brown seed has delayed germination. Seeds are often very numerous, forming a mass from the ground to the tip of the leaves. Brown seeds can remain viable in the soil for 10 years or more.

Cheatgrass

The Invader that won the west!

Cheatgrass as an annual reproducing solely by seed, can invade grassland communities and displace native plants; it thrives in disturbed areas. This weed can produce more than 10,000 plants per square yard and is highly flammable. Seed heads have awns that may injure eyes and mouth of grazing animals and contaminate fleece.

It has an extensive root system. The wide-spreading lateral roots are one of the keys to the survival of this plant. A study showed that it had the capability to reduce soil moisture to the permanent wilting point to a depth of 70 cm, reducing competition from other species. It is an abundant seed producer, with a potential in excess of 300 seeds per plant. In the field, under buried conditions, seeds will lose their viability in 2–5 years. Seeds germinate in the late fall or early spring. Has rapid spring growth, with seeds maturing within 2 months of beginning growth. The seed head is open, drooping, much branched panicle; spikelets contain 5 to 8 florets; glumes and lemmas pubescent or downy; lemmas narrow with awns 5/8 inch long or longer. The leaves are pubescent blades and sheaths; blades flat, 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch wide; leaves rolled in the bud; ligules 1/16 to 1/8 inch long, membranous, rounded to collar shaped, with long pointed teeth; auricles absent.



Locoweed



Woolly or White locoweed



Two-grooved milkvetch

Locoweed (Rod Litzel, JCWP District Supervisor)

Spring is on the way and so are the weeds. Everyone from the homeowner in town, the small acreage owner or farmer/ rancher is affected in some way by weeds, some by their invasive nature and others by their poisonous attributes towards livestock. It's easy to recognize weeds such as Canada thistle or Leafy spurge as something that should not be a part of a healthy landscape as they generally begin as a small patch and spread out from there. Others however, are a seemingly benign part of the landscape, that given the right opportunity the "perfect storm" can come together to cause significant problems in livestock.

Locoweed is one such plant that poses a serious threat especially in drier years. Several species of Locoweed fall into this category including Two-grooved milkvetch, Lambert or Silky crazyweed, and White or Woolly (purple) locoweeds. They are members of the legume or pea family and are actually native rangeland plants. Not all Locoweeds are poisonous, but White and Woolly are the most common troublemakers. Locoweeds contain a toxic compound called swainonine that affects animal growth, reproduction and the nervous system. Symptoms of poisoning include the staggers, running in circles, drooling and looking unthrifty. There is no known treatment and generally the effects are not reversible, usually resulting in death. However, if a poisoning is caught early enough and the animal is immediately removed from access to locoweed the effects can be minimized.

Locoweeds generally do better in wet years; however, they may have more of an impact on livestock in a following dry year, as at least one Johnson County resident found. While the presence of Locoweeds may not be a result of overgrazing as they can be present in well managed rangelands as well, it certainly can exacerbate the risk of a poisoning and allow Locoweeds increased opportunity for spread. Locoweeds are generally one of the first plants to green up in the spring and in wet years with grass readily available they usually do not cause a problem. If, however, a dry year ensues with little grass competition, the perfect storm arises. If livestock are forced to eat Locoweeds because little to no other forage is available, they may more readily do so. Spring green-up and fall regrowth are the most common times when livestock poisoning occurs. During the summer months, the dry plants remain toxic but are generally unpalatable and therefore less likely to be eaten.

Furthermore, studies have shown that cattle that might be deficient in protein may in fact seek out Locoweeds because of their high protein levels. As such, providing cattle a protein supplement during early lactation when their protein needs are greatest and until Locoweeds mature and are less palatable, will help in keeping cows from seeking it out during this critical period.

Horses generally are not as intensively managed for grazing as cattle, therefore they can be particularly at risk for poisoning in a small acreage situation; when competing with cattle for forage in a Locoweed infested pasture; or worse yet, immediately follow a cattle grazing rotation as the Locoweed is greening up in the spring or back up in the fall. Horses usually never recover once they are poisoned. Cattle can gain weight back slowly but will often have abortions, while abortions are common in sheep following a poisoning.

Locoweeds exhibit perennial growth characteristics, in that they re-grow each year from the same root. However, there is some evidence that suggests that some of the specie populations are cyclic in nature and tend to fall off in drier years, with White Locoweed being the most persistent and less cyclic. As such, livestock poisonings have followed the same erratic trend.

Identification, education and management are the key to dealing with Locoweeds. Correctly identify which specie or species you are dealing with, evaluating the extent of the infestation and grazing management has to be a priority. Create or have Locoweed free pastures for spring grazing when livestock are most susceptible to Locoweed poisoning; never overgraze pastures but especially if they contain Locoweed as this increases the risk of livestock poisoning as well as giving the Locoweed a competitive advantage over the desirable plants; and carefully monitor livestock for effects of Locoweed poisoning so that they can be moved to a Locoweed free area and thus less likely to succumb to its effects. Locoweeds are not terribly aggressive or invasive in nature; therefore, it is unlikely they would completely dominate a properly managed landscape, so it may not always be necessary to chemically treat entire acreages for them. Chemical treatment may be considered when trying to create a locoweed free pasture, especially if other weedy species, such as fringed sage, broom snakeweed, curlycup gumweed, or cactus are also present and out competing the range grasses. Contact the local County Weed & Pest District or Extension Service for help with Locoweed identification and recommendations.