

Tall Larkspur



Not your average camping adventure.

In 2009, Johnson County Weed & Pest Control District implemented a program on Tall Larkspur, at the request of a landowner at the south end of the mountain. Because of distance, location and acres to be covered the project became an overnight trip and the landowner has been gracious enough to allow District use of their cabin. Rod Litzel, District Supervisor, takes some members of his back pack crew to the remote location where they spend three days carrying a 35 lb pack back looking for “wildflowers”.



Tall Larkspur is an herbaceous perennial. The leaves are deeply lobed with 3-7 toothed, pointed lobes in a palmate shape.

The main flowering stem is erect, and varies greatly in size between the species; it is topped with a raceme of many flowers, varying in color from purple and blue. The flower has five petal-like sepals which grow together to form a hollow pocket with a spur at the end, which gives the plant its name. Within the sepals are four true petals. The seeds are small and often shiny black. The plants flower from late spring to late summer.





Tall larkspur provides fair to good forage for sheep and some wildlife. It is palatable to cattle even though other plants are available. Horses seldom eat it. Tall larkspur is poisonous to cattle until after blossoming. It contains alkaloids, which act on the nervous system. Seeds are the most poisonous part of the plant. The poison content of larkspur is high during early growth, then drops off rapidly after maturity, except in the seed pods. Poisoning of cattle is less likely after flowering is past. Researchers say tall larkspur contains up to 20 different alkaloids that vary in toxicity from very poisonous to almost harmless. Alkaloid levels can vary from one patch to another and from year to year in the same patch. It takes more pounds of larkspur consumption in some years to be fatal.

Tall larkspur can be hard to control with herbicides. The entire tap root and underground buds must be killed, or it will re-grow the next year. Care should be taken when treating tall larkspur with cattle still in the pasture as often times, treatment can actually make the plant more palatable. Grazing sheep on larkspur prior to turning cattle in can limit losses. Most cattle losses occur under heavy infestations and early in the season as they incidentally graze it.



Two years of treatment