

Poisonous Plants in Florida

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Introduction

Poisonous plants have been known to man since before the time of Christ. A number of references in the Bible allude to the poisonous properties of some plants. In early times, knowledge of these plants was used largely for ulterior motive, particularly, before much was known about metallic poisons. As civilization progressed knowledge of the poisonous plants has increased, due largely to the importance of grazing plants in the economy of livestock production.

In the United States annual losses among livestock caused by the consumption of poisonous plants has been estimated at many millions of dollars. It is very difficult to estimate the actual loss in Florida caused by livestock eating poisonous plants. Losses have occurred in all parts of the state and in certain instances have been very severe. The rapid development of the livestock industry in this state during the past 15 years has placed increased emphasis on the importance of poisonous plants. Losses from this cause often can be largely prevented, and it is with this thought in mind that this bulletin is being published.

It is important to realize in dealing with these plants that publications from other states, while basically correct in the information contained, do not necessarily reflect conditions here. Many poisonous plants which are of importance in other states may be of little consequence in Florida; conversely, some important poisonous plants in this state are not of particular significance in other states. Also common names of plants often differ in many states and even localities. The name "coffee bean," for instance, is a common name for at least eight plants in various Southeastern states. Therefore, it is essential that as much information as possible be at hand regarding these plants in our state.

Early diagnosis is an important phase in controlling losses caused by poisonous plants. In cases of suspected plant poisoning in livestock a graduate veterinarian, who by training and experience should be able to give valuable assistance, should be consulted as early as possible. In this way what might develop into extensive losses often can be reduced to a minimum.