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RAGWORT

Ragwort is a poisonous plant toxic to horses, ponies, donkeys and other livestock.



The plant contains substances called pyrrolizidine alkaloids which damage the liver and can have fatal consequences.

Symptoms can appear from weeks to years after ingestion of the plant.

Symptoms include:

- Odd behaviour
- Loss of co-ordination
- Photosensitisation.

The toxins in ragwort are not destroyed during the haymaking process, and in fact once made to hay the ragwort loses its bitter taste and is therefore even more dangerous.

Ragwort is also toxic to humans and toxins can be absorbed through the skin. Therefore it is extremely important to wear gloves and keep arms and legs covered whenever dealing with the plant. If possible wear a facemask to avoid inhaling the pollen.

The best time to pull up ragwort is spring time at the rosette stage, before it flowers and produces seeds. Each plant can produce up to 150 000 seeds and these can lie dormant in the soil for up to 20 years.

The rosette shape young plants are easily recognizable.





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Prevention:

- Keep pasture in good condition and pick up droppings regularly
- Use a ragwort fork when digging up the plant to ensure the whole root is removed.

Spot on sprays are also available to kill the plant. Ensure the dead plants are disposed of carefully, preferably burned, as they remain toxic.

Under the animal welfare act animals are protected from potentially harmful situations. The owner of any horse or pony left in a ragwort infested field is in breach of this law and may face legal action.

Under the Weeds Act 1959 the Secretary of State may serve an enforcement notice on the occupier of land on which injurious weeds are growing, requiring the occupier to take action to prevent the spread of injurious weeds. The Weeds Act specifies five injurious weeds: **Common Ragwort**, Spear Thistle, Creeping of Field Thistle, Broad leaved Dock and Curled Dock.

