

PASTURE WEED MANAGEMENT ISSUES FOR HORSES AND CATTLE IN DANE COUNTY.  
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Demand has increased for pasture management information in Dane County. Much of this increase is in direct response to the increased number of horses. Many of the horse owners have little or no knowledge on pasture management techniques. In addition, all are concerned about the possibility of poisonous weeds being present in their pasture. While some of my time has been spent evaluating these pastures for the presence of poisonous weeds, more time has been spent educating owners on what they can do to prevent weed problems.

The first weed that is looked for in Dane County horse pastures is hoary alyssum. A member of the mustard family, hoary alyssum can be found in localized pockets throughout the county and is possibly one of the most toxic weed species to horses that is found in Dane County. While I have not seen hoary alyssum in pastures, numerous other weed species have been found. Smallflower buttercup was found in one new pasture at densities exceeding 10 plants per square foot. Recommendations include ensuring adequate alternative feed being available during the spring and dormant alfalfa treatment to reduce the potential for poisoning.

Other common weed species found that if overgrazed could cause problems included redroot pigweed, jimsonweed, eastern black nightshade, foxtail spp., common lambsquarters, and curly dock. All of these weed species can easily be controlled via proper pasture management practices such as not over-grazing. Two plant species found in Dane County that can be extremely toxic to livestock and horses are poison hemlock and water hemlock. However, both are difficult to find and have very low palatability.

The main factor in controlling weeds in Dane County pastures is to properly manage the grazing of the cattle or horses. This includes resting pasture during hot dry periods, releasing animals to new pastures on a full stomach, and ensuring adequate feed is available at all times.