

Poisonous plant alert! Livestock farmer loses 2 cows after exposure to yew trees.

We had a client this month lose 2 bred heifers after ingesting the needles of yew trees. Because these plants are usually planted around homesteads as a means to enhance the landscaping, you will most likely find them close to homes. However, if you have cattle on pasture and they are in contact with trees and shrubs make sure that you can identify every species before placing them there.

Below, is a synopsis from the information that OMAFRA has placed on its website. We have attached the link if you want more information.
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/horses/facts/07-055.htm>

The genus *Taxus* consists of **three commonly grown** ornamental **shrubs** - **English yew, Canada yew, and Japanese yew** - and hybrids. **The needles and seeds of all yews are highly poisonous** to horses, cattle, sheep and goats, **although the red, fleshy seed covering is not**. Wild deer, moose and elk browse on yews as winter food and are not affected by the yew toxin. **Humans, particularly children, are also susceptible to the toxins in these plants.**

Livestock are accidentally poisoned when yew trimmings, or wreaths made of yew, are thrown onto manure piles or over a fence, where they are easily accessible to horses, cattle, sheep and/or goats.

Yews, fresh and dried, are toxic year round. Consumption of as little as 1-10 g/kg of body weight for ruminants and 0.5-2 g/kg for horses is lethal (2). This means that, for a 454-kg (1,000-lb) horse, as little as 227 g (0.5 lb) of yew needles could be fatal.

Clinical Signs

Sudden death, often within 2-3 hours of ingestion, is the most common observation with yew poisoning. Animals are often found dead next to yew bushes or clippings. Prior to death, muscle trembling, incoordination, nervousness, difficulty breathing, slow heart rate, vomiting, diarrhea and convulsions may be observed. No post-mortem signs are specific to yew poisoning, unless partially digested twigs and needles are found in the mouth and stomach. **There is no specific treatment or antidote** for yew poisoning. Supportive therapies have variable success rates, depending on the amount of yew ingested and how quickly actions are taken.