

Plant poisoning

Alpacas have relatively small livers compared to many other animals and can therefore be more prone to poisoning and liver damage if exposed to toxic plants over time.

Acute poisoning of alpacas due to ingestion of toxic plants is relatively rare. Alpacas are browsers and if feed is available, they will avoid toxic plants, however there are poisonous weeds that should be controlled in paddocks. Many ornamental plants are poisonous and for this reason alpacas should never be allowed to graze in garden areas where such species are likely to be found.

Toxins can occur in a wide variety of plants, from exotic trees and shrubs to certain pasture species. Fortunately, the majority contain alkaloids that are bitter, and therefore less palatable. Mouldy feed and water supporting algal blooms can also cause poisoning.



The relative toxicity of plants may vary according to season and the stage of plant growth:

- Wilting in dry conditions and rapid growth after rain can increase the toxicity of some plants.
- Applying fertiliser to promote lush growth may increase toxicity.
- Some plants may only be toxic when growing in particular soil types.
- Stressful growth conditions, such as drought or insect attack, may cause toxins to concentrate in a plant.
- Plant parts can vary in their relative toxicity.
- Herbicide treatments can increase the palatability of plants.
- When livestock are hungry, they may gorge themselves on things that they would not normally eat. Do not introduce hungry livestock to areas where toxic plants are known to be growing.
- Livestock grazing in an area for extended periods may become accustomed to eating small amounts of toxic plant material. New mobs introduced to the same area will not have the same tolerance.

Poisonous plants can vary in toxicity according to parts of the plant and stages of plant growth. Typical indicators of plant poisoning can include:

- loss of appetite
- abdominal pain (alpacas will sit on one hip with a leg extended)
- restlessness
- diarrhoea

If you suspect poisoning, take samples of the relevant plants to the veterinarian to have them identified and seek appropriate treatment.