



Noxious/Invasive Species

Hemp or Marihuana

(Poisonous Plant)



Illinois

Plants of fencerows, roadsides, barnyards, fields, and waste places

Description

Cannabis sativa L.: Hemp is a coarse, rough-stemmed annual herb that grows up to 9 feet high and resembles giant ragweed in general appearance. The palmately compound leaves are oppositely arranged on the lower part of the stem, but alternately arranged above. Each leaf has 5 to 9 long-pointed, narrowly lanceolate, coarsely toothed leaflets. The flowers are of two kinds—one bearing pollen, the other bearing seeds—but they do not occur on the same plant. Both kinds are small and greenish, and are borne at the tip of the stem and in the axils of the upper leaves.

Occurrence

Hemp, a native of Asia, is found as a weed along roadsides, railroads, and waste places. It is also a plant of sandy pasturelands and of moist soil of bottomlands and along drainage ditches. The distribution of hemp in the United States is peculiar. It has been reported from 39 of the contiguous states. Hemp is most common from Main to Minnesota and South Dakota, south to Virginia, Missouri, and Kansas, with the greatest abundance in the Corn Belt.

Conditions of Poisoning

Since there have been few cases of animal poisoning from the eating of hemp, poisoning is to be suspected only when it is certain that the poisoned animal has eaten a considerable quantity of hemp and no other poisonous plant. Except in the seedling and younger stages, hemp is coarse and unpalatable. The poison is concentrated especially in the upper part of the mature plant as it flowers and produces seed. This part of the plant, if eaten in quantity, may produce narcotic signs and cause death.

Control

Hemp should be eradicated as soon as it makes its appearance. In August, 1969, Illinois classified hemp as a noxious weed under the Illinois Noxious Weed Law, and failure to eradicate the plant in that state can result in prosecution.

Toxic Principles

Hemp contains the alkaloid cannabidiol, the glucoside cannabinol, and the resin tetrahydrocannabinol. These poisonous substances occur in greatest abundance in the crude resin that is formed in the flowering part of the plant. Hemp seed is an important ingredient in bird-seed mixtures, and it is probably the small amounts of poisons in the seed that causes birds to sing more readily.

Clinical Signs

Hemp poisoning produces no clear-cut clinical signs. The signs that do appear are those of narcotic poisoning. The animal may at first appear highly nervous; later, it may give evidence of mental depression and derangement of the central nervous system. If death follows, it results from the depressing effect of the poison upon vital centers and organs.

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Treatment An animal suspected of being poisoned by hemp should be removed at once to a pasture in which no hemp is growing. If the animal appears to be severely poisoned, it should be placed under cover and restricted to a limited diet of hay or fresh forage, with plenty of water at hand. A veterinarian may be called to administer tannic acid and a stimulant.

References Evers, Robert A., and Roger P. Link. Poisonous Plants of the Midwest and Their Effects on Livestock, 1972. Special Publication 24, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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