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News and Information from UT-TSU Extension Wilson County

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Perilla Mint a Toxic Plant for Livestock

Perilla mint causes more cattle deaths in Tennessee than any other toxic plant. Also known as: beefsteak plant, common perilla, purple perilla, purple mint, shiso, Chinese basil, wild basil, blueweed, Joseph's coat, wild coleus, and rattlesnake weed, Perilla mint is very poisonous to cattle and other ruminants, as well as horses.

All plant parts are toxic, especially the flowering structures. Dried plants in hay can be toxic, but the greatest risk is associated with consumption of fresh plant material, especially if flowers and fruit are present. Perilla mint contains ketones that cause acute respiratory distress syndrome in cattle also called panting disease.

Treatment is often ineffective. Although these plants can occur anywhere in a pasture or feed lot, they typically favor semi-shaded environments, and are most frequently located around farm structures, edges of woods and along fence rows.

Cases of poisoning from these weeds are a concern during the late summer and early fall when other grasses and forages might be in short supply and the perilla mint is flowering. Cattle will normally not feed on these toxic weeds unless there is a shortage of other feed. Therefore, it is crucial to have a ready supply of quality feed available for farm animals during this time of the year.

Learning to identify this plant is important. Perilla mint is a member of mint family. Perilla mint is an annual that can grow to heights of 2 feet. The leaves are simple, opposite and can be purple or green tinged with purple. Leaves have coarsely serrated (toothed) leaf margins pointed toward the tip and can be up to 5 inches wide and 7 inches long. Leaves are egg-shaped, with the largest part nearest the base. The stems of perilla mint are square in cross section, erect, hairy, somewhat branched and green or purple. Many small, white to purplish-white flowers with a ring of hairs in the throat are clustered in the terminals of these plants. Reproduction is by seed. Perilla mint has a shallow taproot and fibrous roots. . These plants give off a distinctive, aromatic, minty odor when the stems and leaves are crushed.

Control of perilla mint in pastures, barn lots and forage fields is very important. The best time to scout for and control perilla mint is late April to early June. It is very difficult to control in late summer and early fall when it also becomes the most dangerous to livestock. If control measures are not taken early, it becomes even more crucial in late summer to maintain an adequate supply of quality feed for cattle and other farm animals so they will not feed on these toxic weeds. 2,4-D is rated moderately effective

when plant is young but Grazon Next HL or a new product called DuraCor is the most effective. Treating when the plant is small is the key.

Grazing in infested pastures should be limited during late summer when perilla mint is flowering. Avoid harvesting forages in areas infested with these weeds. Mowing perilla mint plants before seed is produced will help prevent further reproduction and spread.

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