

The Dangers of feeding Garden Clippings to stock

Llamas die after eating garden clippings

4th December 2014

Recently, near Wangaratta, two very much loved pet llamas died after suspiciously eating ordinary garden clippings that had been stacked in a pile in their paddock following a big spring clean up of the garden.

The suspect toxic plant was probably a member of the Solanum family, typically the Blue Potato Bush (*Solanum rantonnetii*), however the llamas were also nibbling on *Chimonanthus praecox* or "Winter Sweet", which contains a neurological and gastrointestinal toxin. These poisonous plants mimic "1080 poisoning" with severe convulsions and death. Wintersweet is grown chiefly for the wonderful scent produced by its small flowers in late winter and early spring. Despite a fragrant flower bloom, the seeds are very poisonous.

Of the Solanum family, sometimes known as the "nightshades", many contain the active toxin "solanine", which causes convulsions and death if taken in large doses. The black nightshade (*S. nigrum*) is also generally considered poisonous, but its fully ripened fruit and foliage are cooked and eaten in some areas.

"Deadly nightshade", commonly seen around Wangaratta, (*Atropa belladonna*) is not in the Solanum genus, but is a member of the wider *Solanaceae* family. It contains an atropine like toxin, which causes constipation and other issues in stock.

Many other plants commonly found in gardens can be very poisonous to both humans and animals. Oleander is well known for its toxicity. Introduced into Australia, early swagmen supposedly died from Oleander poisoning when they stirred their billy tea with oleander leaves.

Even grass cuttings can make an animal sick, even though they are not toxic as such. We have attended horses with bad colic, after being fed grass cuttings.

Other typical house plants such as Irises and Desert Roses are very toxic and we have had cats with kidney failure after licking ornamental iris plants. All members of the Iridaceae family can cause severe local irritation, frothing and gastrointestinal upsets

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For a more complete list of poisonous garden plants, see http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/112796/garden-plants-poisonous-to-people.pdf

Conclusion:

Do not feed any garden clippings to animals unless you are sure you know each species and know they are safe.

Be aware that indoor plants can also be very poisonous, eg Iris plants

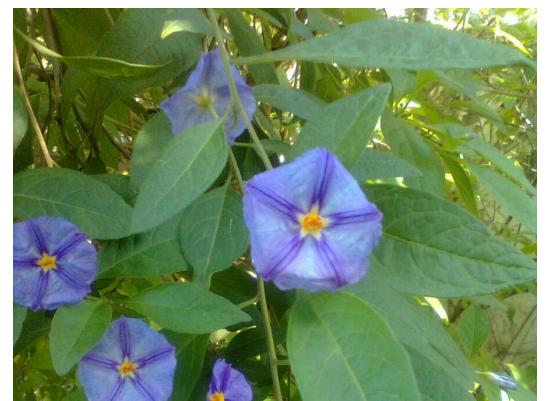
Dr Graeme S Blanch
Warby Street Veterinary Hospital



Winter Sweet blossoms



Closeup of Winter Sweet



Blue Potato Bush in flower

Farewell Dr Graeme Blanch

After 32 years at Warby St Veterinary Hospital Dr Graeme Blanch is hanging up the stethoscope and calling it a day. He has been a stalwart presence in the practice for many years and has fostered the development of many veterinarians and veterinary nurses during his time here. He has forged strong bonds within the community he calls home and his presence will be greatly missed by the staff and clients alike. Over the years Graeme has been a strong driving force behind the adoption of new technologies and the provision of state of the art methods in rural practice. As a result Warby St Veterinary Hospital and more recently Wangaratta Equine Hospital have been able to provide services that in the past would have been considered referral options and required a much longer drive.

Graeme has always had a strong involvement in the advancement of animal welfare from volunteer work in Northern India to his help establishing an RSPCA branch in Wangaratta many years ago. He also has a deep love for the Australian bush and wildlife, particularly of the feathered variety. It has always been a common sight to see Graeme heading home with an injured bird in a cage under his arm to care for overnight.

Graeme's last official day of work will be December 31st 2014 (and we kindly haven't rostered him on call for the night!). No doubt he won't be that easy to get rid of and will make cameo appearances from time to time as a locum when the need arises. Graeme hopes to continue his involvement with the veterinary profession through volunteer work, locum work and the training of veterinarians in what he likes to call his "reinvention" rather than his "retirement". So long Graeme and thanks for everything you have done for the community (human and animal) over the last 32 years.



NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST

We produce a 4 page newsletter every season to keep our clients informed about the goings on at Warby St Veterinary Hospital and the Wangaratta Equine Hospital. We send the newsletter out with our statements each time it is printed, but also deliver it electronically by email. If you would like to receive the newsletter in your email inbox you can either email me your address at tim@warbyvet.com.au or fill out the slip below and return it to Warby St Vet Hospital or Wangaratta Equine Hospital in person or by snail mail.

YES! I'D LIKE TO RECEIVE THE QUARTERLY WARBY ST VET HOSPITAL NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL!

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"Red Bag" - a foaling emergency

The equine placenta is adhered to the uterus by millions of microscopic interfaces called micro-cotyledons. These attachments are essential for the transfer of oxygen and nutrients to the developing foal. In the area of the cervix there is an absence of these interfaces and as a result the placenta is white and smooth here (the cervical star), whereas the rest of the placenta is a brick red colour and velvety in appearance.

In a normal foaling the cervix relaxes and the uterine contractions push the cervical star through the cervix. The pressure should cause the cervical star to rupture and release the allantoic fluid ("water breaking"). Shortly after (5-10minutes) a thin, grey/white membrane (the amnion) should appear. Following this the feet and nose should appear within the amniotic sac. The foal should be delivered within 15-30 minutes of the waters breaking. This is the normal pattern of foaling.

In some circumstances the placenta will detach prematurely from the uterus and be pushed out through the cervix. This is apparent as a red bulging fluid filled bag from the vulva, which has been aptly named a "red bag" foaling. Often the intact smooth white intact cervical star can be clearly seen on the protruding "red bag". As the placenta has detached from its oxygen supplying interfaces the foal's oxygen supply is cut off and without prompt delivery of the foal it will suffocate and pass away. As a result "red bag" needs to be very promptly recognised and corrected.

The bag should be opened immediately to release the allantoic fluid and allow the foaling to continue as it should. Veterinary help should be sought immediately after the red bag has been opened carefully with a clean knife or scissors. If someone can be calling the vet while the red bag is being opened, even better. In many cases there is also an abnormal presentation of the foal as well and this will need to be rectified before the foal can be delivered. Oxygen ideally should be given to the foal if it is born alive as they can continue to suffer from low oxygen even after birth.

Red bag can occur due to stress, placental infections (placentitis) or fescue toxicity. It accounts for around 10% of late term or early life foal losses. Late term ultrasound examination (especially after a bloody discharge is observed) can help to identify that a premature separation of the placenta is developing and allow a plan to be put in place to treat it.



"Red Bag" - note the red velvety area around the whiter, smoother cervical star at its centre.



The amniotic sac protruding with one of the foal's feet visible. Note the clear/white colour and the transparency allowing the foal to be seen compared to the red opaque "red bag" above.



The newborn foal in the amniotic sac. Note: this should ideally be ruptured as soon as possible to free the mouth and nostrils and allow breathing to commence.

Canine Parvo Virus

Canine Parvo virus is a serious illness of dogs that causes gastro-enteritis (vomiting and bloody diarrhoea) and in more severe cases can cause problems with the heart and bone marrow. It is most serious in young pups whose immune system is still developing and they have trouble fighting off the virus. Untreated in puppies the disease has a very high fatality rate. The main characteristic of parvo virus that makes it such a problem is its ability to survive in the environment for months or even years. As a result places where parvo infected dogs have been (backyards, parks etc) can continue to infect other dogs for many months after the initial case. Luckily there is a very effective vaccine available to protect dogs from parvo virus.

It is recommended that puppies be vaccinated at 6-8 weeks of age and again at 10-12 weeks of age. In some breeds a 3rd dose at 14-16 weeks may be recommended. This is particularly true in Rottweilers who seem to be particularly susceptible to parvo virus infection. It is also recommended that pups not be taken to public areas like parks until 1 week after their second vaccination. Visiting friends whose dogs are up to date with vaccination should be safe. After the initial puppy vaccination course a booster is recommended in 12 months. This booster can be protective for 3 years if a triennial registered vaccination is used. Parvo virus vaccination is extremely effective in preventing animals getting sick from the disease and is infinitely cheaper than trying to treat the disease (both psychologically and financially).

Summer seems to bring on an increase in the number of parvo cases that we see. Thankfully due to widespread vaccination of puppies the number of cases that we see is far lower than it was 10 or more years ago. Watching a puppy suffer from parvo virus is a heartbreaking experience, made worse by the fact that it is an entirely preventable disease.



VACCINATION REMINDERS

We know that a lot of our clients rely on us sending them reminders when their animals are due for ongoing preventative health measures, like vaccinations or cartrophen injections for arthritis. We have always relied on posted reminders in envelopes in the past, which we feel are beneficial because of their tangible nature. A letter pinned to the fridge or notice board keeps on being visible and keeps on reminding us to get our pets into the vet. We are continuing on with posted reminders, but you may notice that they have changed to a more colourful smaller postcard type compared to the old letter in an envelope. These reminders still contain the same information as before and help the environment a little by reducing paper use. We are also trying to move with the times and technology and looking at sending reminders by email or SMS. All transmitted reminders rely on us having accurate contact information so if you think your address or mobile phone number may be out of date on your client record please let us know so we can continue to remind you effectively when your animals are due for a visit, test or treatment.



One of our new postcard style reminder notices. Coming to a mailbox near you soon!