

'Grass Affected' Horses Become 'Problem Horses'

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Cows and sheep are completely different to horses in their respective digestive systems and therefore their dietary requirements. Yet horses are often expected to graze on the very same pastures (rye grass and clover) which are selected for rapid weight gain and milk production. Sometimes overnight, sometimes over a longer period of time, the horse ingests toxins to the point his liver can no longer cope, the toxins then invade many organs, in particular the brain & nervous system, they can inflame muscles, constrict circulation and upset the reproductive system. Hence the extremely wide array of symptoms we see in horses throughout New Zealand.

Putting it mildly the poor, 'toxiced up' horse now 'feels like cr...p' and of course starts 'behaving badly' sometimes to the point of being dangerous. The owner, who is unaware of the true cause of the uncharacteristic behaviour, frequently misreads the whole situation and may punish the horse thereby **creating** a problem horse. At the worst these horses can 'end up in the can', at the least you and your horse are not enjoying each other the way you should and the risk of accidents rises. When horses are 'grass affected' it is counter-productive to try to 'work thru it'. You are not dealing with the true horse anyway. Leave them alone until they are back to their normal selves. You will know!

Go to any equine event and you will see hundreds of horses who are not behaving as well as they could, can't cope with the pressure, are up-tight, therefore being held onto tighter by the rider which makes the horse feel worse, it goes on and on and is completely unnecessary if you understand how to properly feed the horse in the first place.

Horses are never 'nutty', 'cranky', 'naughty', 'nasty', 'piggy', or 'stubborn' by nature. Not one of them! Sure there are variations in breeds and temperament but I would venture to say not nearly as much as you would think.

The simple fact is that *changes in the grass cause changes in the horse!!* Weather induced variations in sugar content, mycotoxin production, photodynamic pigment bio-chemistry, mineral balances, phyto-estrogen levels and many other factors ALL affect the horse.

What you may not know about Red Clover!

We all know that rye-grass contains endophytes which produce myco-toxins, but did you know that red clover does too? One that is highly neuro-toxic to horses. No wonder horses on clover so often become head-flickers!! I didn't know this until I read "**Poisonous Plants in the Pasture, A Horse Owner's Guide**" by Dr Deb Bennett Ph D. Dr Deb, inspired largely by the problems reported here in New Zealand has filled in the gaps for us and produced this wonderful 'book' (CDRom) containing hundreds of pictures so that we can identify plants and grasses potentially poisonous to our horses.

There are in fact many reasons why Red Clover is on the "Skull & Cross-Bones" list for horses and yet many people think they are buying or feeding 'the best' when they can obtain it for their horses! The old adage "What is good for the goose is not necessarily good for the gander" certainly applies here. What is good for rapid weight gain and milk production in sheep and cattle is nothing short of disastrous for horses and their unsuspecting owners.

Evaluating 'Temperament'

Years of careful observation have led me and others now to the conclusion that "You Cannot Judge a Horses Temperament when:

1. He is eating poisonous grasses or plants
2. The fibre content of his diet is inadequate to feed the flora in the hind-gut
3. The mineral content of his diet is insufficient to run his large musculature and nervous system Each of these points on their own will create what appear to be 'temperament' or

Hi Jenny

Just a few words to say thanks so much for intervening with my daughters horse. A couple of months back I contacted you so I could purchase some alleviate, as our wonderful horse had turned vicious, and was attacking my daughter, rearing, bucking, you name it she did it, she turned very aggressive towards other horses, and we had decided that we were going to put her down. We had tried EVERYTHING literally, and nothing worked. You phoned me and advised me to take her off our rye/clover and paspallum paddocks, and feed her hay only, and get her onto alleviate. It has taken a while, and I think that was due in large that we let it go on for so long, and she was more toxic than she would normally have been. We have now sprayed out her paddocks, and re-grassed with brown top, timothy, cocksfoot and prairie grass, the horse is great and competed at her first ODE on Sunday (has had 3-4 months off work due to the seriousness of her situation) and she came second overall for the day.

We were so impressed, there was no aggressiveness, no anxiety at all, she was a star! Thanks so much for your advice, your phone calls, and most of all for caring. We would have put down a fantastic horse if not for you. In hind sight we have had rye grass problems for years, just not as severe as this, and all other problem horses have been sold.

Kind Regards
Lois McKinley

behavioural problems, let alone when several are happening at once.

The good news is that the same feeding regime will eliminate most problems. Do what it takes to eliminate harmful plants, feed hay, cubes, chaffs and beets and the best minerals and vitamins. Therein lies the key to calm, healthy, contented horses that are 'good to go' all year round! Read Lois' story (inset)