

# Hemp Dogbane

Apocynum cannabinum L.

**Other Common Names:** Indian hemp, wild cotton, dogbane, Indian physic, American hemp, rheumatism weed

**Species Affected:** sheep primarily, less commonly horses and cattle

**Description:** Hemp dogbane is a 3 – 4-foot tall erect plant with branches in its upper half and 2 – 3” long egg-shaped leaves. It produces white-green flowers and long, slender seedpods. All parts of the plant exude a milky white sap when injured. It has a deep taproot with creeping horizontal roots which send up sprouts. The plant’s stems start out green but turn red as it reaches maturity. Hemp dogbane can sometimes be confused with milkweeds, but has smaller leaves.

**Growing Location and Timing:** Hemp dogbane grows in a wide variety of conditions: plains, foothills, gravelly or sandy areas, agricultural fields, pastures, hay fields, meadows, creek beds, irrigation ditches, and along fence lines. It often grows in clumps or patches. It starts growing in late spring or early summer.

**Toxin:** Hemp dogbane and other dogbane plants contain cymarins, which are cardiac glycosides similar to digitoxin and act as heart stimulants.

**Toxic Plant Parts:** All parts of the plant are toxic, both when green and dried.

**Possible Effects on Livestock:** Possible symptoms include vomiting, rapid pulse, dilated pupils, a blue coloration to the mucous membranes, muscular weakness that gets worse over time, convulsions, coma, mild myocardial degeneration, and death 6 – 12 hours post-ingestion. The typical lethal doses are as follows: for sheep, 0.5 – 1 oz. per 100 pounds of body weight, for cattle and horses, 0.5 – 0.75 oz. per 100 lb. body weight. Rate of consumption largely determines the toxic dose.

**Preventative Measures:** Animals usually avoid hemp dogbane and its bitter sap unless no other forage is available, but sheep in particular will eat large quantities if deprived of other forage, so the best toxicity prevention method is to avoid putting animals on pasture where their only forage option is hemp dogbane, and consider chemical control to reduce infestations.

*Resources:* [Hemp dogbane | Integrated Crop Management \(iastate.edu\)](https://www.iastate.edu/extension/forage/forage-weeds/hemp-dogbane/)

[Hemp dogbane - Getting Rid Of Weeds \(growiwm.org\)](https://www.growiwm.org/hemp-dogbane-getting-rid-of-weeds/)

[2019WG-hemp-dogbane.pdf \(msu.edu\)](https://www.msu.edu/~plant/2019WG-hemp-dogbane.pdf)

[Hemp Dogbane \(Apocynum cannabinum\) : USDA ARS](https://www.ars.usda.gov/resources/land-use-management/hemp-dogbane/)



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