

Buttercup (crowfoot)

Ranunculus sardous and other species



Low annual or perennial herbs from fibrous roots or thickened rootstocks or bulbs, often with a basal rosette of leaves. Stem leaves alternate, simple, lobed or divided. Flowers usually axillary and solitary, with five green sepals and five glossy yellow petals that give the plant its common name, buttercup. Fruit a head of achenes. Potentially poisonous buttercups occur throughout the South; most common in low, moist areas along creeks and in open woods and pastures. [Inset: flowers and fruit cluster]

Toxicity

This plant contains an irritant oil called protoanemonin. This oil is not a highly toxic substance and is present in various species of buttercup in differing amounts. In general, the flowering plant contains more toxin than the younger plant. The toxin is present in the stems and leaves. The plant is very distasteful to livestock. All livestock are affected.

Symptoms

Signs include abdominal pain, severe diarrhea, convulsions, and death. Milk from affected cows will be bitter and may be reddish in color. Although buttercup poisoning is uncommon, it occasionally occurs in cattle when other forages are in short supply.

Treatment

Nonspecific. Give purgatives initially, then gastrointestinal protectives later.