

Great laurel *Rhododendron maximum*



Very similar to *R. catawbiense*, but flowers white, leaves larger and narrowed to base; *R. catawbiense* leaves are rounded to base. Distribution is also similar but *R. maximum* is mostly below 3,000 feet and along stream banks and in moist woods; *R. catawbiense* is mostly in well-drained sites above 3,000 feet.

Rosebay *Rhododendron catawbiense*

Shrub or densely branched small tree 1 to 3 m tall. Leaves alternate, leathery, evergreen, entire, lanceolate to elliptic, 8 to 15 cm long, 3 to 7 cm wide. Flowers showy, pink to purple, 1.5 to 2 cm long, in terminal clusters. Found almost exclusively in the mountains of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia; mostly on rocky slopes and on ridges sometimes called “hog-backs.”

Toxicity

Most of the many species of *Rhododendron* are considered poisonous (deciduous *Rhododendron* spp. are known as azaleas). The toxic principle is called andromedotoxin, which is a white carbohydrate material. Some may also contain a glucoside of hydroquinone. While *Kalmia* spp. are also termed “laurel,” they cause poisoning by other toxic principles and result in other symptomology.

Poisoning can occur at any time of the year but is more commonly seen in the early spring or in wintertime when snow covers other vegetation. Sheep, goats, and cattle are commonly affected by grazing all portions of the plant, but particularly the leaves. Deaths have also been recorded in humans and in sheep.

Symptoms

Symptoms include vomiting, bloating, salivation, and abdominal pain as evidenced by straining. Eventually the animals grow weak, stagger, and become prostrate. Occasionally, pneumonia is present due to inhalation of rumen contents into the lungs during vomiting.

Treatment

Use sound judgment in treatment. For instance, don't drench or otherwise orally medicate animals that are vomiting or showing excessive swallowing movements. Inhalation pneumonia may result. Veterinarians may be able to pass a large bore stomach tube to relieve bloat or perform gastric lavage (This is very difficult on roughage diets).

Use mineral oil, magnesium sulfate, and calcium gluconate. Administer intravenous fluids, such as glucose and saline solution.