
Hairy vetch *Vicia villosa*



Annual, biennial, or rarely perennial, trailing or climbing herb, 0.5 to 1 m tall, with densely hairy stems (a cultivated variety is not hairy). Leaves alternate, pinnately compound, with terminal leaflet modified into a branched tendril; leaflets 10 to 29, narrowly oblong to linear, 1 to 3 cm long. Flowers violet or rarely white, 1.2 to 2 cm long; 10 to 40 flowers borne together in racemose axillary clusters. Fruit, a flattened pod, 2 to 3 cm long, 7 to 10 mm

broad. Found throughout the southern states east of the Mississippi River; mostly in fields, roadsides, and waste places.

Toxicity

A cyanogenetic glycoside is present in vetch seed. In Alabama, cattle have exhibited signs of cyanide poisoning after eating from a sack of vetch seed left in a barnyard.

Symptoms

Symptoms include bellowing, sexual excitement, a wild appearance, crawling on the ground, and death. Some species of vetch have been known to cause liver damage and photosensitization.

Treatment

Treat cyanide poisoning with sodium thiosulfate and sodium nitrite. If cattle exhibit photosensitization, keep them in a shady area and give antibiotics to prevent secondary infection.