

Mountain laurel *Kalmia latifolia*



Large, densely branched shrub or small tree up to 5 m tall. Leaves thick, leathery, evergreen, mostly alternate or in whorls of threes, elliptical, 8 to 15 cm long, 1.5 to 5 cm wide; margins entire and rolled in. Flowers white to pink, 2 to 3 cm in diameter, in large showy clusters. Found in all the southern states but less common in the Coastal Plain; most common on dry, rocky slopes and ridges and in open woods. [Inset: flower of *K. hirsuta* (wicky), a common shrub, mostly of the lower Coastal Plain, more common than sheep laurel]

Sheep laurel *Kalmia angustifolia*

Very similar to mountain laurel and also toxic. Shrub to 1.5 m tall. Usually a smaller plant than *K. latifolia* with narrower and smaller leaves and smaller flowers that are more often pink than white. This species usually occupies wetter sites and is limited mostly to mountainous areas of Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia.

Toxicity

The resinoid andromedotoxin and the glucoside arbutin are the toxic principles responsible for symptoms. Sheep, goats, and cattle are susceptible to poisoning if they eat the plant, especially the leaves. There are recorded cases of toxicity in humans and monkeys.

Most clinical cases of laurel toxicity are seen in the winter and early spring months. When other forage is not available, livestock may consume the toxic evergreen laurels.

Symptoms

Signs of toxicity occur usually within 6 hours after the plants are eaten. Symptoms include incoordination, excessive salivation, vomiting, bloat, weakness, muscular spasms, coma, and death. The animals are often found down, unable to stand, with their heads weaving from side to side.

Treatment

In severe cases, do not drench animals or give medicine by mouth since they may be unable to swallow due to weakness of the throat muscles. Administer mineral oil or saline laxatives by stomach tube. Give intravenous electrolyte solutions.