

---

**Dr Dawn M Sessions**

350 East Linden Street  
Boise, Idaho 83706  
(208)-353-6286  
vetdrdawn@gmail.com

May 27, 2017

**Mr. Lloyd Knight**

Administrator  
Plant Industries Division  
Idaho Department of Agriculture

Dear Mr. Knight:

As Veterinarians, we know how severely acute and terrible toxicities from Yew ingestion can be. Most ranchers have their animals fenced off from toxic plants like Hemlock, Yew or Lupine or at least know what times of year these plants are abundant and refrain from running animals on the affected lands but wild animals roaming habits cannot be controlled. Hemlock most often is abundant summers and fall so most wild ruminants ie deer, elk, moose and antelope often are in higher areas and good food plots are everywhere so they rarely ingest the Hemlocks but Yew species are a different story. Folks landscape with the Yew species, ie Japanese Yew, Chinese Yew and English Yew because they grow easily and remain green all year. When wild ruminants drop down elevations in the winter to find foraging/feeding grounds, they spot the green color a mile away and literally run to the plant to eat it. The Yew species are so acutely toxic that a few mouthfuls will kill almost immediately, resulting in large numbers of dead deer, antelope, elk or even moose at the site of ingestion. The loss of wild ruminants and wildlife can be astonishing, especially in hard winter times. This loss of wild game actually costs the Fish and Game potential income by the mere loss of potential harvestable game for the people of Idaho. We Veterinarians feel that the toxic Yew species (ie. Japanese Yew, Chinese Yew, and the English Yew, but NOT the lesser toxic Pacific Yew) should be added to the existing list set forth in Rule 02.06.22.02 which provides:” Weeds listed in the control list are known to exist in varying populations throughout the state. The concentration of these weeds is at a level where control and/or eradication may be possible. A written plan for weeds on the Statewide Control Noxious Weed List shall be developed by the control authority that specifies active control methods to reduce known

---

populations in not more than five (5) years. The plan shall be available to the Department upon request.”

The State of Idaho currently spends ALOT of money to prevent spread of Invasive Species and personally, we feel that this IS an Invasive Species that should be prevented from spreading by plantings that are done innocently by folks that want to landscape their new home lots, or even plant at existing home sites. Merely warning folks about their toxicities will not suffice: we must act now before this plant species takes hold and continues to kill livestock, wild animals and potentially humans. Please address this in detail at the next negotiated rule making meeting. We feel that the toxic Yew species definitely fall into the Noxious Weed statutory definition and maybe even falls into the Invasive Species category. We Veterinarians support the petition of Angela Rossman to amend Department Rule 02.06.22 to include the toxic Yew species to the list of Noxious Weeds pursuant to the laws enacted by the Idaho Legislature. Please meet your Statutory Duty.

Sincerely,

**Dr Dawn Marie Sessions, Owner/Senior Veterinarian,  
Broadway Veterinary Hospital**



Weather Sponsor



HAVE A GREAT STORY? SEND A TIP! 208-528-NEWS

# TOXIC PLANT HAS KILLED DOZENS OF ANIMALS IN IDAHO THIS YEAR

OUTDOORS 1 Updated at 2:41 pm, February 3rd, 2017 By: [EastIdahoNews.com staff](#)

SHARE THIS STORY



The following is a news release from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

IDAHO FALLS — Eight elk outside of Idaho Falls were added to the roster of known wildlife mortalities so far this year in Idaho, which have been linked to the toxic non-native Japanese Yew plant. Wildlife lab results confirmed that **all of the animals** had ingested the ornamental shrub which is highly toxic even in very small amounts to many animals.

In mid-January, fifty pronghorn succumbed to the shrub near Payette, Idaho and earlier in the same month seven elk died in the Boise foothills from eating the introduced ornamental shrub that remains green all year round and is attractive to even animals that may not be starving. In December of 2016, some domestic cattle near Burley, Idaho died from eating some Japanese Yew clippings that they had access to. Many types of plants can be toxic to humans and certain animals, so it is important to learn what you have growing around your home.

The elk involved in this latest incident were probably some of the elk impacted by the Henrys Creek Fire east of Idaho Falls, much of which destroyed important winter range on the Ten-Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Feeding operations are operating at the WMA in an attempt to

roadways and near the creek at Fox Creek, these elk that died from eating the Japanese Yew were in very good body condition and not starving.

The Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG) is encouraging homeowners that live on the edge of town to be aware if they have Japanese Yew growing on their property. IDFG will work with residents to determine if they have the toxic plant on their property. According to Regional Supervisor Jim White, "If homeowners are willing to remove the plants we will work with them to reimburse them for replacements that are safe for wildlife."

To learn more about reducing the potential for conflict with wildlife from Japanese Yew homeowners can call 208-525-7290.

**NEVER MISS A STORY! [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE FREE EASTIDAHONEWS.COM APP](#)**



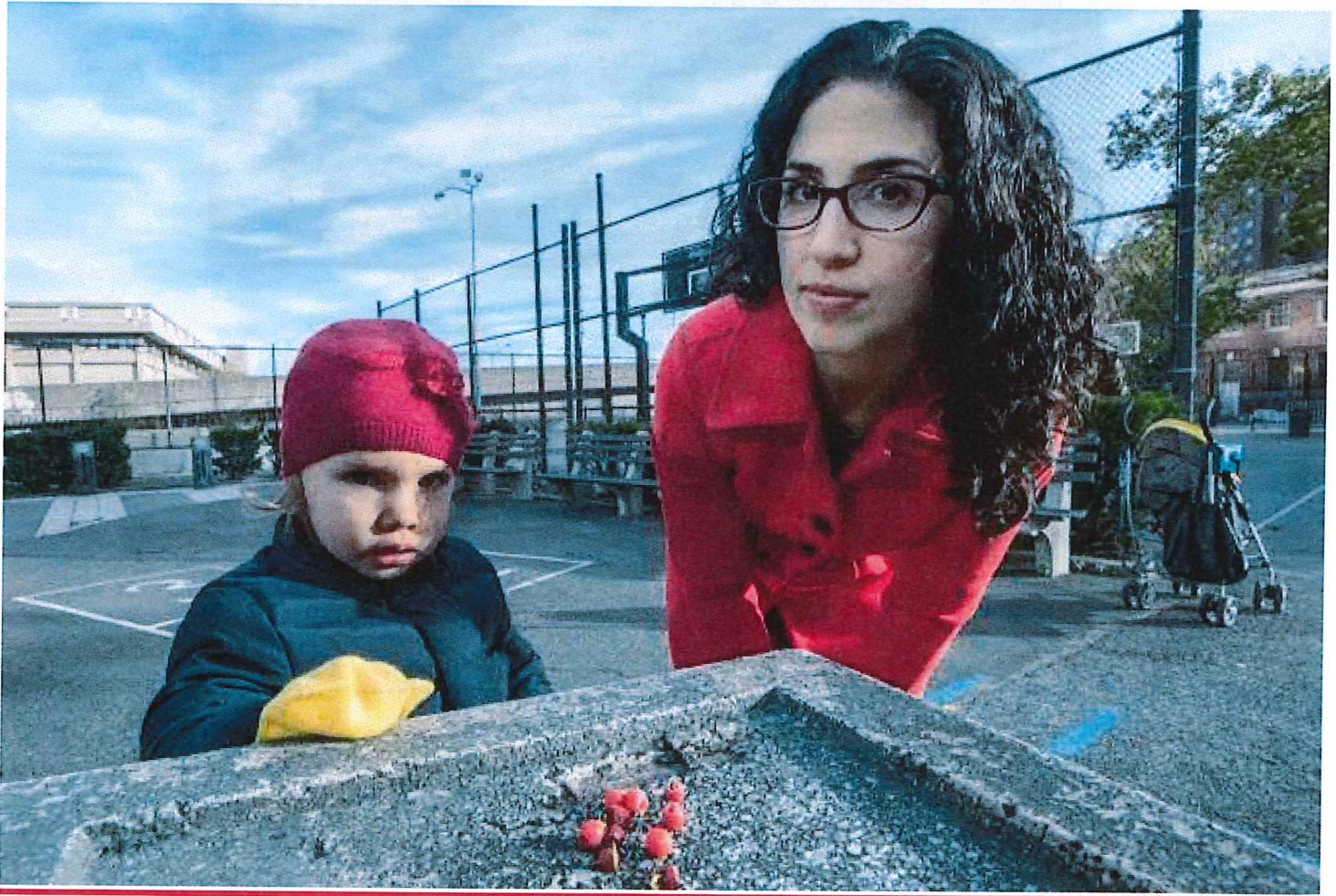
**Managing Editor**  
Visit Stories

METRO EXCLUSIVE

# This city park's deadly berries nearly killed a 2 year-old-girl

By Dean Balsamini

October 30, 2016 | 6:07am



Natalie Gruppuso and her daughter Joy

J.C. Rice

A innocuous-looking hedgerow in a city playground is actually what botanists call “the plant of death” — and it could have killed a 2-year-old girl.

Little Joy Vernon spent seven hours in the emergency room at NYU/Langone Medical Center on Sept. 17 after popping a poisonous yew berry in her mouth while frolicking at Asser Levy playground on East 23rd Street near the FDR Drive in Kips Bay.

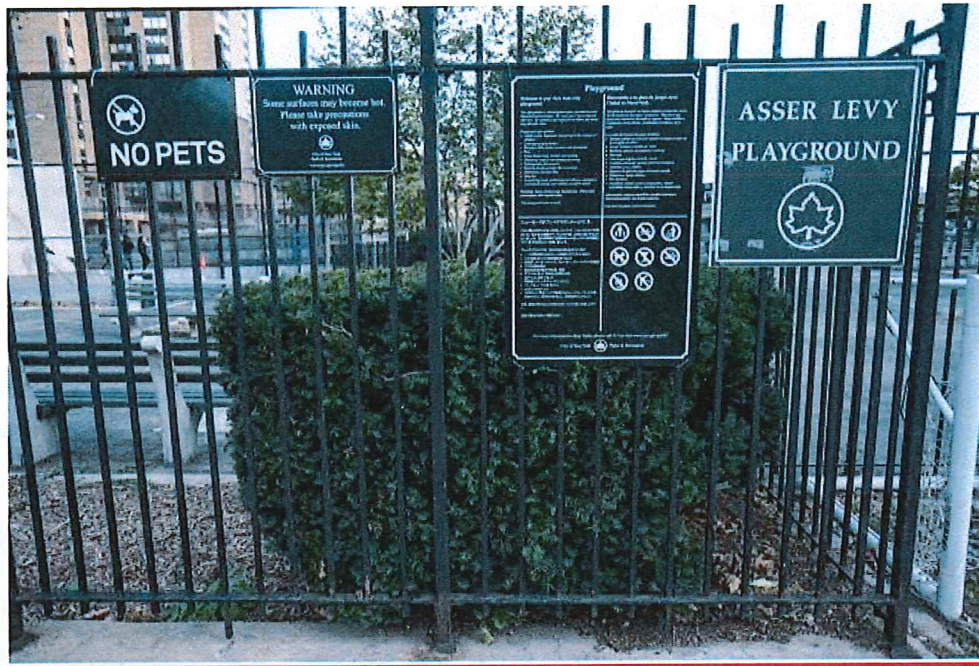
She found the tempting bright-red berry in the water fountain.

The flesh of the berry is safe, but the tiny seeds are potentially lethal. Had the 22-pound toddler consumed more, experts told The Post, she could have been dead in an hour.

Joy's parents are now demanding that the city dig up the decorative but deadly yew plants at not only Asser Levy but at all the city parks and playgrounds that harbor them.

Advocates said the plant is common throughout the city park system.

<http://nypost.com/2016/10/30/this-city-parks-deadly-berries-nearly-killed-a-2-year-old-girl/>



Asser Levy Playground at Avenue C and East 23rd Street.  
J.C. Rice

At Asser Levy, “these bushes are literally surrounding the playground,” said Joy’s mom, Natalie Gruppuso. “I want them removed, because toddlers are very likely to put things in their mouth that look enticing.”

Gruppuso’s husband, Ryan Vernon, was at the park with Joy at about 6 p.m. when the near-tragedy unfolded.

“My husband was watching her — but not on top of her — because we didn’t want to be helicopter parents,” the mother said.

When Vernon saw Joy standing at the water fountain and putting something in her mouth, he ran to her and found a “bunch” of red berries on top of the fountain drain. She said she swallowed one.

Vernon did a Google image search of shrubs with red berries and realized Joy had eaten a yew berry, Gruppuso said. He texted his wife, who called the poison-control hot line.

She was told “the seeds are quite toxic and can lead to cardiac arrest.”

“I called my husband back and said, ‘Stop everything you’re doing!’ ”

Vernon rushed Joy to the NYU emergency room.



A Yew Bush at Asser Levy Playground  
J.C. Rice

Over the course of seven hours, doctors took Joy's temperature, heart rate and vitals — and determined she luckily was not poisoned, the mom said.

Biologist Frank Reiser of Nassau Community College, who successfully crusaded a decade ago to have yew shrubs removed from eight Nassau County parks and playgrounds, had this message for city officials: "Remove the plants as quickly as possible. This is the season where the berries are red and ripe. This is the season where there is the greatest risk."

"It's a plant where just five seeds can be lethal and it shows very little symptoms before the onset of toxicity, so you're not warned," he said. "There is no antidote."

Gruppuso said she contacted the Parks Department and received no response, and that her complaint to 311 resulted in "no action taken."

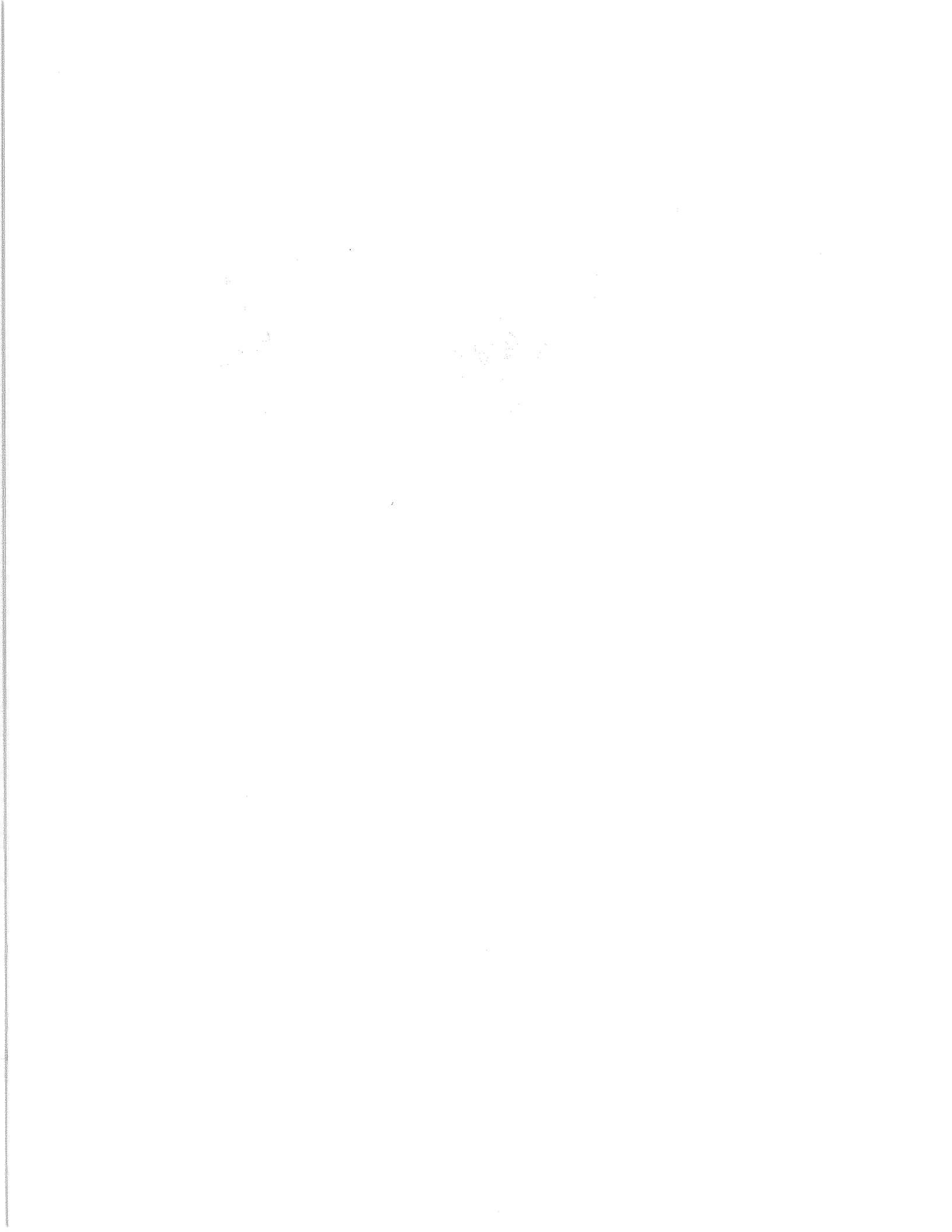
That prompted her to launch an online petition, which garnered 126 signatures. She sent it to City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Councilwoman Rosie Mendez and Parks Department official Pia Rivera.

After a Post inquiry Friday, an agency spokeswoman said the city's 30,000 acres of parks contain "innumerable uncatalogued species" and "nobody should eat anything growing in a park."

"This is the first incident of its kind in memory," the spokeswoman added. "We are taking the matter seriously and reviewing next best steps for addressing this species when found in playgrounds."

FILED UNDER **ILLNESSES, MEDICAL CARE, PARKS DEPARTMENT**

Recommended by





See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/22394146>

# Case report: Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) poisoning in cattle

Article in *The Canadian veterinary journal. La revue veterinaire canadienne* · December 1978

Source: PubMed

---

CITATIONS

11

---

READS

58

2 authors, including:



[Ian K Barker](#)

University of Guelph

179 PUBLICATIONS 4,007 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

All content following this page was uploaded by [Ian K Barker](#) on 16 May 2017.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

## CASE REPORT

### Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) Poisoning in Cattle

G. W. THOMSON  
AND I. K. BARKER\*

#### Introduction

European Yew (*Taxus baccata*) is considered the most dangerous of all poisonous plants in Britain and is a relatively common cause of poisoning of European livestock (3, 4). The Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) is similarly toxic (1, 3, 4, 5) and because it is a hardier member of the *Taxus* family is the most common ornamental yew in the Northern U.S.A. and in Canada (4, 5). Bruce, in 1927 recorded an occurrence of *Taxus* poisoning (*Taxus canadensis*) in cattle in the lower Fraser Valley of British Columbia (2). Lowe *et al* (5) and Alden *et al* (1) report on cases of *Taxus cuspidata* poisoning of livestock in the U.S.A. The lethal effects of consumption of this plant by livestock, and lack of reference to it in Canadian veterinary literature prompted this case report.

#### History

Herd A — In the early morning this group of 13 Angus cows were found in the yard chewing on juniper plants around the foundation of the house. They were put into a small field and fed hay. In the late afternoon one cow became recumbent, gasped a few times, rolled over onto its side and died. In the early evening another cow, while eating hay, suddenly became recumbent and died within minutes.

Herd B — Four of a group of 35 Holstein heifers and cows were found dead in a field in the early morning. The group had been on the pasture for three weeks, were fed supplemental hay and were last observed the previous evening. Following the four deaths, the group was moved into a small padlock for observation and a fifth animal died later in the day. Investigation following the diagnosis revealed that the previous day the gardener had trimmed a hedge around the house and had dumped the clippings onto the pasture.

#### Laboratory Findings

One animal from herd A and three from herd B were necropsied. All were in excellent general condition. All carcasses were severely bloated and showed evidence of severe autolysis. Rumens had marked gas caps and contained roughage of normal to dry consistency. Coniferous plant material, including 2 cm long needles and 3 mm x 1 mm droplet-shaped "seeds", was found in the rumen content of the carcasses from herd B (Figure 1) and a slight "piney" odour of the rumen content was noted. No significant histological lesions were detected in a variety of tissues examined from the four carcasses. Samples of the plants from both premises were identified as *Taxus cuspidata*.<sup>1</sup>

#### Discussion

Livestock found dead on pasture present a diagnostic challenge to both clinician and pathologist. In addition to entities such as bloat, clostridial toxemias, lightning, hypomagnesemia, chemical toxicities (urea, organophosphates and heavy metals) and anthrax, poisoning by certain indigenous and exotic plants should be considered.

Taxine, the toxic principle of Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) is present in all parts of the plant and resists prolonged storage and drying (4). It is a nonirritant alkaloid which apparently primarily depresses conduction in the heart, resulting in arrest in diastole (3). Taxine is rapidly metabolized, apparently by the liver, and excreted as benzoic acid (3) and therefore no toxicological test is useful in diagnosis. No specific gross or microscopic lesions are present in the carcasses.

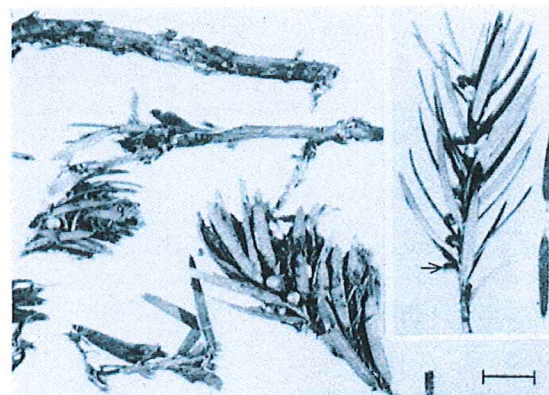


FIGURE 1. Plant material from rumen content of carcasses from herd B. Inset of a branch of fresh foliage of Japanese Yew. Note linear, stiff 1.5-2.5 cm leaves and small ovoid young male strobili (arrow). Scale at bottom right corner represents 1 cm.

\*Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Veterinary Services Laboratory, Box 3612, Guelph, Ontario N1H 6R8 (Thomson) and Department of Pathology, Ontario Veterinary College, Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1 (Barker).

<sup>1</sup>Identification kindly done by Dr. G. Lumis, Department of Horticultural Science, University of Guelph and Dr. J.F. Alex, Department of Environmental Biology, University of Guelph.

Diagnosis of taxine poisoning therefore depends on two features: clinical history and finding foliage in the rumen content. As in the present cases, those reported in the literature occurred following either access to trimmings of the plants or access to the ornamental shrub around buildings (1, 2, 5). The history in herd A indicated the cattle chewed juniper plants surrounding the foundation of the house. Juniper is not considered toxic and this feature of the history was therefore felt to be incidental to the loss of the two animals. It was not until a few weeks following necropsy that plants were gathered and identified as Japanese Yew. Recognition of coniferous material in the rumen content of carcasses from herd B brought forth the history of access to hedge trimmings.

Animals from both herds were in excellent general condition and were on high-quality feed and yet apparently readily consumed yew foliage. Herd A was poisoned in the early spring and herd B in the late fall. Taxine is reportedly in greatest concentrations in the plant in the winter. These facts indicate toxicities can occur year round. Toxic doses are not well established but are given as 10 g of leaves per kg body weight (total about 500 g) for the bovine (3). There is no known antidote for taxine following ingestion by domestic species.

#### Summary

Two incidents of poisoning due to ingestion of foliage of the Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*) resulted in sudden deaths of seven cattle. Diagnosis depended upon history of access to and demonstration of plant material in rumen content of carcasses as no gross, histological or toxicological findings are significant.

## BOOK REVIEW

*Abomasal Secretion and Motility in Sheep*. J. Van Bruchem. Published by Centre for Agricultural Publishing and Documentation, Wagenigen. 1977. N.A. Distributors: ISBS Inc., Box 555, Forest Grove, Oregon. 140 pages. Price \$9.50.

This monograph is apparently the author's Ph.D. thesis and will be of limited interest to the general

#### Résumé

Deux cas d'empoisonnement consécutifs à l'ingestion d'aiguilles de l'if japonais, *Taxus cuspidata*, entraînent la mort rapide de sept bovins. Le diagnostic reposait sur l'anamnèse, qui confirmait l'ingestion de ces aiguilles par les bovins, et sur la présence de telles aiguilles dans le contenu du rumen. En effet, les lésions macroscopiques, l'histopathologie et la toxicologie ne donnent pas de résultats concluants lors d'un tel empoisonnement.

#### Acknowledgments

The authors thank Dr. C.J. Young, Campbellville, Ontario and Dr. John Chesney, Department of Clinical Studies, Ontario Veterinary College for providing the clinical histories. Since this writing Dr. Young has brought to our attention a further occurrence. Two of seven thin, overwintering cattle died after breaking into a yard and chewing Japanese Yew plants.

#### References

1. ALDEN, C.L., C.J. FOSNAUGH, J.B. SMITH and R. MOHAN. Japanese Yew poisoning of large domestic animals in the midwest. *J. Am. vet. med. Ass.* 170: 314-316. 1977.
2. BRUCE, E.A. *Ostragalus campestris* and other stock poisoning plants of British Columbia. Dominion of Canada, Department of Agriculture Bulletin 88. 1927.
3. CLARKE, E.G.C. and M.L. CLARKE. *Garner's Veterinary Toxicology*. Third Edition. pp. 399-401. London: Baillière, Tindall and Cassell. 1967.
4. KINGSBURY, J.M. *Poisonous Plants of the United States and Canada*. pp. 121-123. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. 1964.
5. LOWE, J.E., H.F. HINTZ, H.F. SCHYRVER and J.M. KINGSBURY. *Taxus cuspidata* (Japanese Yew) poisoning in horses. *Cornell Vet.* 60: 36-39. 1970.

reader. The research itself is not a major contribution to the field although well worth publication. The literature survey may be of some interest to workers in the area. It is, however, marred by lapses in English.

The literature on neurohumoral control of secretion and motility has expanded greatly in the past few years and the usefulness of this work is therefore reduced by the fact that there are only a few references as recent as 1976. *H. Chapman.*