

Larkspurs, *Delphinium* spp.

Identification: At least 60 species exist in the West, from Alaska to Mexico. It is best to assume all are toxic. Generally, palmately-lobed leaves clustered around base. Hollow stems. Showy flowers, generally blue to purple with distinct, prominent spur; produced on terminal, erect racemes.

Habitat: Pastures, rangeland

Animals Affected: especially cattle, horses and sheep affected if consume vast quantities and are under stress.

Toxin Family: Diterpenoid alkaloids Most toxic early in the season, and young leaves are palatable.

Other: Tall larkspur becomes more palatable once stem elongates and flowers are produced (toxin is reduced later in the season, though seeds remain highly toxic). A “toxic window” occurs between stem elongation and seed set – plants are palatable and still toxic. Low larkspurs are most palatable early in the spring, when they are most toxic. By the time low larkspur flowers, there is enough other forage to reduce cattle’s interest. Poisoning leads to muscle weakness and paralysis. Rapid bloating in cattle, often they fall down with head pointed downhill. Death is rapid. Graze infested areas only if abundant forage is available or late in the season and avoid grazing during the “toxic window”. **Larkspurs cause more fatalities of cattle in the western US than any other native plant.**

