



Black nightshade

ONE OF the most common weeds I see in crops and new pasture is black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*). It's commonly – and wrongly – linked to the rare deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*), which has only been found in the Christchurch area in small numbers.

Black nightshade is in the same plant family as potatoes, tomatoes, capsicums, tobacco, and aubergines. It's not commonly eaten in NZ, but if its leaves and ripe berries are cooked the right way, the toxic alkaloids are removed.

This summer annual grows upright to 50cm or so. The large leaves and stems turn from dark green to purple as the

plant matures. It has small white flowers with yellow centres, and small berries which turn from green to purple-black.

Birds and rodents eat the berries, which spreads the seeds.

How to control it

Wear gloves and hand-weed plants in your garden or pasture. You can also mow them off if you spot them before the berries set.

Pasture sprays containing Flumetsulam (Headstart, Valdo) or MCPB + Bentazone (Pulsar) do a good job and are clover and grass-safe.

Always seek professional advice and read the product label before using a herbicide.

Why is it a weed?
Fast-growing, each berry contains 60 seeds, widely distributed by birds and rodents

Where is it found?
Common in gardens and pastures throughout NZ

Is it toxic?
The green berries and wilted leaves contain toxic alkaloids

Other uses
Eaten in some countries – leaves are steamed, and ripe berries are added to jam



Should you worry?

NZ's National Poisons Centre gets over 100 calls a year about black nightshade. Almost all (90%) relate to children who've eaten the berries.

Medically, even the green berries are low in toxicity – a 12kg child would need to eat 30+ berries before it was of concern. Symptoms include fever, sweating, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, confusion, hallucinations, and stupor, usually 6-12 hours after ingestion.

What it can do to livestock

Poultry, cattle, horses, sheep, and goats that eat wilted leaves or too many green berries can have symptoms including excess salivation, colic, diarrhoea, dilated pupils, loss of appetite, muscle tremors, weakness, laboured breathing, depression and drowsiness. In serious cases, toxins can affect the kidneys and heart. Talk to your vet if you suspect an animal has eaten black nightshade.

Deadly nightshade

1m high+

Large, bell-shaped, brown-purple flowers

Large, egg-shaped black berries

Black nightshade

0.5m high

Small, white, star-shaped flowers

Little black berries, similar to black currants



About Gary

Gary Bosley works as PGG Wrightson's North Island technical specialist in agronomy. He and his family live on a 4ha lifestyle block south-east of Auckland. PGG Wrightson Ltd (PGW) does not warrant the information's accuracy, quality, outcome or fitness for any purpose.



NOTE: We recommend you get your own independent advice before you take any action on your block. Any action you take is strictly at your own risk.