

BE ALERT TO HEALTH RISKS WHEN GRAZING TURNIPS

Good moisture has boosted growth of summer planted turnips and many are ready to graze. This wonderful resource is not without potential health hazards, however.

Turnips may be the best grazing option available for late fall and winter. But, like everything else, they can cause problems.

Turnip leaves can cause a blood mineral disease called hemolytic anemia, a brain disorder called polioencephalomalacia that is characterized by twitching and incoordination, a breathing disorder called pulmonary emphysema, and even bloat. These problems generally occur during the first couple weeks of grazing. Turnips can be high in nitrates and also affect function of the thyroid gland and, thus, are goiter-genic.

Now this may all sound scary, but most problems are rare and are reduced or eliminated with careful management. To begin, don't shift cattle onto turnips suddenly. Adjust them by feeding high quality hay or pasture for a couple weeks before grazing turnips to prepare their rumen for the high energy and protein in turnips. Giving them just a few hours access to turnips at the start also helps. Make sure they have access to a dry roughage like corn stalks or a palatable hay. This also helps reduce diarrhea, which is common with turnips. Strip grazing that forces cattle to eat both roots and tops reduces problems and increases carrying capacity. And finally, always provide an iodized salt-trace mineral mix.

Many folks worry about choking. It's not very common but it does happen. Growers who have experienced this problem tell me that they usually can remove the plug using a stick or by hand.

Don't be afraid to graze turnips; they're a wonderful resource. Just manage carefully and be alert so problems don't affect you.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

