



What is this??



It is often known as 'dead man's fingers', it is called hemlock water dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*). This is one of the most poisonous indigenous plants in Britain! It is usually found in ditches, marshes, in streams and on riverbanks. But due to the recent bad weather we have had reports of the plants being found on pastures.

The water dropwort is usually more noticeable in July when its flowers and it can reach up to five feet tall. The lower stems are fairly thick and joins to clusters of 'fleshy' tubers which is why as you can see in the picture it gets the popular name of dead man's fingers. Water dropwort is from the family Umbellifer, which is the same family as celery, parsnips and carrots.

However the entire plant is poisonous, it contains oenanthotoxin, which is a highly unsaturated higher alcohol, which is known to be poisonous and cause convulsions. It is also poisonous to people and fatalities have occurred when the leaves have been eaten after being mistaken for celery or parsley! It has been reported that sheep are less susceptible to the toxin than cattle, pigs or horses - just one root is enough to kill an adult cow.

Most reports of poisoning have been in overgrazed fields where perhaps the livestock have eaten the water dropwort due to lack of choice. Trying to eradicate water dropwort is usually unsuccessful as it is a native species, so the best ways to remove the risk is either to restrict access to damp ground and rivers especially if you are aware of water dropwort growing there. You can also gather any washed up water dropwort and remove them to an area which will not be grazed.

As always any questions or concerns about poisoning then please give us a call at the surgery.

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