Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*)

Also known as: goat-bane, cattle-destroyer and horse-killer

Known to Produce: Mad honey

**Symptoms:** This plant produces a poison that will put people out of sorts for a full day and night. When bees gather nectar from the plant, they carry the poison with them and create poisoned honey, which is called “mad honey.”

Not long after eating mad honey—between 20 minutes and three hours—people oft become dizzy and disoriented. They’ll sweat profusely and suffer from vomiting and diarrhea. Methinks it won’t harm them forever though. On the morrow, the effects will begin to wear off.

*It also causes shock, seizures and drooling. This toxin is rarely fatal for humans though—it seems to make them simply very weak for a while.*

The poison involved is called grayanotoxin. Victims experience either a dangerously slow or dangerously fast heartbeat, depending on the dose and where the affected cells are located.

**Where to find it:** Verily, you’ll locate this plant on mountains of the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey.

Sometimes this poison can be found in other rhododendron species in North America.

**Anatomy:**

- Densely branched evergreen shrub with pink to purple flowers and woody capsules containing small seeds.
- Leaves, flowers and nectar produced by these bushes are all poisonous. Nectar has the highest concentration of the toxin
  - The toxins collect in young tissues, such as the emerging leaves and buds. **This helps the plant defend itself against plant-eaters.**
Medicinal Uses?
Mad Honey has historically been used to relieve coughs and abdominal pains. Though it is unsafe, some people around the Black Sea still use it in traditional medicine to treat hypertension and diabetes mellitus.

A Sweet Victory
Dost thou knowest the legend of King Mithridates? He was a king who fought back against the powerful Roman army. In 67 BC, the mighty Roman general Pompey and his vast forces were in pursuit of Mithridates and his small army along the south shores of the Black Sea. Mithridates heard that bees in this area produced poisoned honey, so he ordered his men to collect honeycombs and place them on the trail behind them.

Pompey’s men found the trail and, hungry from the journey, ate the honeycombs without a second thought. Three Roman squadrons—about 90 men—became very ill. They sat down, feeling weak, dizzy and in pain. Mithridates’ men jumped out from their hiding spots, wiped out the weakened men, and won an important battle. This poison is called “mad honey” because the men who eat it seem to go mad.

Get Rid of Goats
Domesticated animals may die just by eating too many of this plant’s leaves. This is why, south of the Black Sea, these plants are called “goat-bane,” “cattle-destroyer,” and “horse-killer.” The animal that eats it will suffer from stomach pain and vomiting, leading to exhaustion and possibly death.