



Chinaberry

Melia azedarach

Chinaberry is a tree that grows up to 50 feet tall with a broad, spreading, rounded crown. The large leaves of up to 15 inches long have leaflets of up to 3 inches long.

Loose clusters of purplish, fragrant flowers give rise to hanging clumps of smooth single-seeded fruits about 0.5 to 0.75 inch in diameter. The clusters of fruit ripen to yellow in the fall and often persist on the tree through the winter.

Distribution and habitat

These introduced trees were widely planted as ornamentals in the eastern two-thirds of Texas. Many have escaped and may be found in thickets, floodplain woods and borders of woods. Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Toxic agent

Meliatoxins A1, A2 and A3 are responsible for the toxicity of these plants. They are found in highest concentration in the fruit, but the bark, leaves and flowers are also poisonous.

Many species—including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, rats, rabbits, guinea pigs, poultry and humans—have been poisoned by chinaberry.

Pigs and dogs are poisoned most frequently, usually by ingesting fallen fruits. They show clinical signs within 2 to 4 hours of consumption.

Livestock signs

The clinical signs are related to the gastrointestinal and/or nervous system and include:

- Anorexia
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Excitation
- Incoordination
- Depression
- Convulsions

Animals surviving for 24 hours have a good chance of recovery. Rarely do clinical signs last longer than 48 hours. Most cases result from animals consuming the fruit from the ground.

Because this intoxication is rapid, the hard, ribbed pit from the fruit is easily identifiable from the stomach contents of dead animals.

Integrated management strategies

Remove chinaberry trees from the area of pens used for swine. Other animals should not be forced to consume the bitter fruit.

