



Lechuguilla

Agave lechuguilla

Lechuguilla is a member of the same genus (*Agave*) as the century plant. Each plant consists of a crown bearing 20 to 30 thick, fleshy leaves 1 to 2 inches wide and 12 to 18 inches long. The leaves bend upward, have prickles on the margins and end in a sharp spine.

At 10 to 15 years old, the plant flowers once, then dies. The flower stalk produced at this time is 6 to 12 feet tall. New plants are formed from seed or by offsets from the parent plant.

Distribution and habitat

Lechuguilla is found in western Texas, southern New Mexico and south into Mexico. Prominent on dry hillsides and limestone hills, in dry valleys and in bordering canyons, it is especially abundant in the Trans-Pecos region of Texas. Regions: 7, 10.

Toxic agent

Sheep and goats are poisoned by lechuguilla most often under range conditions. Cattle are poisoned somewhat less frequently, although this plant can seriously threaten cattle during extended drought. Horses are not known to be poisoned.

Lechuguilla poisoning is thought to be the combined action of two photodynamic toxins, one of which is a hepatotoxic saponin. In

experiments, sheep and goats fed as little as 1 percent of their body weight of lechuguilla leaf developed signs of photosensitization in less than a week, and died from the effects of liver and kidney damage in 1 to 2 weeks.

Livestock signs

Signs occurring under range conditions include:

- Listlessness and lack of effort to keep up with the flock or herd
- Decrease in water and food consumption and eventual anorexia
- Jaundice (yellow-tinted mucous membranes, eyeballs, skin, fat)
- Occasionally, port-wine-colored urine
- Photosensitization with swelling of the face and ears
- Progressive weakness and emaciation
- A short period of coma just before death

Postmortem examination may reveal swollen, greenish to black kidneys, a deep golden liver and yellow body fat.

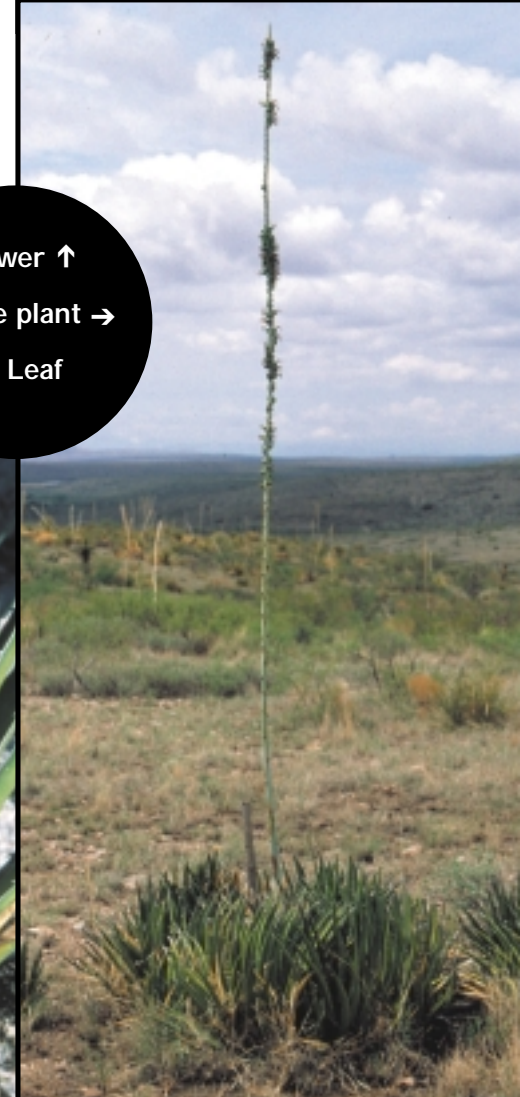
Integrated management strategies

Remove animals exhibiting signs of poisoning from pastures containing lechuguilla. Place them in

shade and give them good-quality feed and dry hay. Animals with severe jaundice usually die.

Because lechuguilla poisoning generally occurs when other, more desirable forage is lacking, any range management practice improving the range condition helps cut losses. Proper mineral supplementation, especially with phosphorus, is desirable. Remove plants along trails and in shipping traps, especially when hungry livestock are being trailed or held for shipping.

Herbicides do not control lechuguilla well. Grubbing provides good control, but is impractical for large areas.



Flower ↑
Whole plant →
← Leaf

