



# Pokeberry, Pokeweed

*Phytolacca americana*

Pokeberry is a smooth, shiny plant arising from a large perennial rootstock. Its stalks become purple-red with age and are usually 5 or 6 feet tall but may be as tall as 10 feet.

The large leaves, up to 4 inches wide and 10 inches long, are entire (the edges have no notches or indentations) and alternate. The small white or pinkish flowers are arrayed in drooping spikes and give rise to juicy, purple-black berries.

## Distribution and habitat

Pokeweed is found in the eastern two-thirds of Texas and is reported from Maine and Ontario to Florida and California. It usually grows in disturbed, sandy soils and is often found in bulldozed brush piles. Regions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

## Toxic agent

Saponins are concentrated in the rootstock and young leaves of pokeweed. All species of animals have been affected by consumption of the plant. Pigs uprooting the plants and consuming the rootstocks are the most likely to be poisoned.

Young leaves are eaten by humans as greens, but the water must be changed during cooking to remove the toxins.

## Livestock signs

This plant is a gastrointestinal irritant, with clinical signs of poisoning occurring within a few hours of consumption:

- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (sometimes with blood)
- Death

Consumption of the leaves usually produces only a transient gastrointestinal disease in ruminants. Cattle often consume small amounts of mature leaves with no ill effects.

## Integrated management strategies

Do not place pigs in a pen containing well-established plants with large rootstocks. Short pastures containing old brush piles with large amounts of pokeberry and little other forage should not be used for livestock.

