



Berlandier Nettle Spurge

Jatropha cathartica

Berlandier nettle spurge is a perennial herb that grows from enlarged, tuberlike woody roots up to 10 inches thick. The hairless stems, 4 to 10 inches tall, are branched and spreading.

Its palm-shaped leaves are up to 4 inches long and very deeply lobed five to seven times. Showy red flowers up to 0.5 inch in diameter are arrayed in loose clusters at the ends of the stems. The fruit is a three-lobed capsule containing three seeds.

Distribution and habitat

In Texas, these plants are limited to the Rio Grande Plains. They can be found scattered among the brush growing on clay soil. Regions: 2, 6.

Toxic agent

The toxic agent or agents of nettle spurge are not known. Very little research has been conducted on this plant. The seeds of a Central American species of *Jatropha* cause a similar disease. Those seeds contain phorbol esters, a trypsin inhibitor, a lectin and phytate.

Intoxication has been recognized in humans, chickens, goats and calves. Both cattle and penned deer have been poisoned by *Jatropha cathartica* in Texas.

The tubers allow nettle spurge to respond rapidly after rain during drought, so it is available for consumption before there is much growth of other plants.

Livestock signs

Signs of poisoning are associated with the gastrointestinal system and include:

- Weakness
- Diarrhea (at times with dark blood)
- Death

Integrated management strategies

Animals should not be forced to consume this plant. It is unpalatable, and livestock will not consume it if adequate forage is available.

Mechanically remove these plants from deer pens or any other dry-lot situation.

