



Bitter Sneezeweed

Helenium amarum

Bitter sneezeweed is an erect, upper-branching annual, 10 to 20 inches tall with narrow leaves, alternating on the stem. The flowers are noticeable in the late spring or summer and are located at the end of each branch.

Two varieties of this plant are identical except for the flower color: one is all yellow; the other is yellow with a red-brown center. Each bloom has about eight cleft ray flowers (petals) with three lobes, often bending downward at maturity.

In some years, the lower leaves are lost, new growth occurs up the stalk and new flowers appear in the fall. The entire plant has a strong odor and is bitter to the taste.

Distribution and habitat

Bitter sneezeweed is found in all vegetational areas of Texas. The yellow variety is widespread in disturbed, sandy or loamy soil in the eastern part of the state, while the dark-centered variety is often found in calcareous soil in more western areas. Regions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Toxic agent

A sesquiterpene lactone is responsible for the toxicity of bitter sneezeweed, which is greatest

at time of flowering. This bitter plant is seldom consumed at a level high enough to produce clinical signs. However, it has been responsible for bitter, undrinkable milk and is suspected to be the cause of unpalatable meat from calves slaughtered off the range. The toxin is stable in plants contaminating hay.

Livestock signs

Signs of bitter sneezeweed poisoning include:

- Weakness
- Incoordination
- Vomiting
- Salivation
- Diarrhea
- Grinding of teeth

Integrated management strategies

Avoid cutting hay containing a large amount of bitter sneezeweed. Do not feed hay containing any of the plant to lactating dairy cows. Do not slaughter grass-fed cattle from a pasture that contains bitter sneezeweed.

Severe infestations may be controlled with broadleaf herbicides such as 2,4-D or Grazon P+ D® at 0.5 to 1.0 pound a.i./acre in the spring with good growing conditions.

