



Chinese Tallow Tree

Sapium sebiferum

Chinese tallow is a fast-growing weedy tree with milky sap. It grows up to 30 feet tall and often spreads by root sprouts. Its slender limbs and branches droop and are easily broken.

The leaves are hairless, alternate with smooth margins and have diamond-shaped blades that are shorter than the petioles. They turn bright yellow, orange or red in the fall. The flowers have no petals and grow in 2- to 6-inch drooping spikes at the end of each branch.

The walls of the three-celled fruit fall readily at maturity, leaving three chalky white seeds, which may remain attached through the winter. These nutlike seeds have a hard coat covered by tallow that becomes black with weathering.

Distribution and habitat

Chinese tallow was introduced from Asia and is planted widely as an ornamental. Birds disperse the seeds, and it has escaped in the southeastern part of Texas, where it can be a significant invading woody species. Regions: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Toxic agent

The toxic agent is unknown. The terminal leaves and green fruit have a strong purgative effect on the bowels of cattle.

The consumption of 1 percent of an animal's weight in green plant material can produce clinical signs within 12 to 14 hours. Losses may occur when cattle are forced to consume significant amounts of the plant in the seed-pod stage. Sheep and goats are not affected significantly.

These trees are more significant as a cause of decreased forage production than as a toxic plant.

Livestock signs

The signs of poisoning are associated with gastrointestinal disorder and may include:

- Diarrhea (sometimes with free blood)
- Anorexia
- Listlessness
- Weakness
- Dehydration

Integrated management strategies

Animals consuming the plant and suffering from diarrhea often recover when it is removed from the diet. Chinese tallow is unpalatable and is not consumed when good grazing management practices are followed. Pastures with many tallow trees should not be severely overgrazed, especially in early summer when the trees are putting on fruit.

Severe populations of Chinese tallow may be controlled with broadcast applications of Grazon P+D® (2.5 pounds a.i./acre) or Tordon 22K® (0.5 pound a.i./acre) in the spring or fall.

Individual plants may be controlled with spot applications of Velpar L® at 4 ml per 1 inch of stem diameter or with a basal stem treatment of 25 percent Remedy® plus 75 percent diesel fuel oil.



↖ Flower
Leaf and fruit ↗
Whole plant ↓

