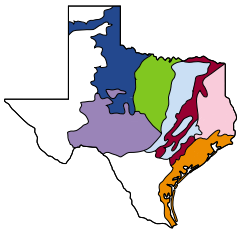

Red Buckeye, Pale Buckeye

Aesculus pavia

Red buckeye is a shrub or small tree sometimes reaching 35 feet tall; its trunk reaches up to 20 inches in diameter and has smooth, gray or brownish bark. Large, deciduous, palm-shaped compound leaves are attached by petioles up to 6 inches long. The five serrate leaflets are up to 7 inches long and up to 2.5 inches wide.

The showy red flowers are displayed in erect clusters with tubular, five-lobed flowers and equal petals. A leathery capsule contains one to three large glossy brown seeds up to 1 inch in diameter. The western variety of this species is similar, but has pale yellow flowers.

Distribution and habitat

Buckeye is found in the eastern half of Texas and ranges east to North Carolina and Florida and as far north as Illinois. It is usually found in forests, along streams and on rocky hillsides in East Texas, and the shrub form is seen in improved bermudagrass pastures. The yellow-flowered variety usually grows along streams in canyons of the Edwards Plateau. Regions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8.

Toxic agent

A glycoside called aesculin and/or a narcotic alkaloid is responsible for the toxicity of this plant. Buckeye has poisoned cattle, horses, sheep and swine as well as children.

Intoxication usually occurs in the spring when young tender leaves are present, especially in times of drought when other forage is short. Deaths in cattle have resulted from consumption of mature seeds off the ground.

Livestock signs

Many animals exhibit severe signs of intoxication within a few hours of consuming the plant. Clinical signs include:

- Uneasy, staggering gait
- Trembling
- Weakness
- Depression

Some animals suffer severe central nervous system depression, become comatose and die. Most cases, unless they are comatose, recover if further consumption is prevented. Because the onset of clinical signs is so acute, seed fragments are usually present in the rumen of cattle found dead after eating the seeds.

Integrated management strategies

Most fatal cases of buckeye poisoning occur when animals are forced to consume a large amount of plant material. Supplying adequate hay through the winter and into the spring during drought can prevent poisoning.

Animals that consume lethal amounts of the seeds usually have been introduced into previously vacant pastures in which seeds have accumulated. Keeping cattle in the pasture when the seeds are falling can prevent them from consuming a large amount of seed at one time.