



Wild Plum, Cherry, Peach

Prunus spp.

Fourteen species and several varieties of *Prunus* are listed in Texas. These range from shrubs less than 6 feet tall to trees about 100 feet tall. Most are usually not over 15 feet.

They are usually deciduous, and winter buds have many overlapping scales. The leaves are seldom entire and are usually toothed along the margins.

The flowers have five white, pink or red petals and are solitary or arranged in tight bundles or spikes. The fruit is single-seeded and fleshy.

Distribution and habitat

Prunus species are widespread, and two or more species grow in each vegetational area of Texas. Some grow in open areas, while others are found as undergrowth in wooded sites. Many of the shrubby species grow in mottes in fields and pastures or along fence rows. Regions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Toxic agent

Cyanogenic glycosides contained in the seeds and leaves of *Prunus* plants are broken down to free cyanide in the gastrointestinal tract or in damaged plant material.

All livestock species are susceptible to cyanide poisoning, but

most cases occur in ruminants because conditions in the **rumen** favor hydrolysis more than those in the acidic stomachs of other species.

Wilted or frost-damaged leaves are very hazardous, as they contain free cyanide. Poisoning is often encountered when mechanically damaged trees or shrubs are available for livestock consumption.

Livestock signs

Cyanide is one of the most rapidly acting of all poisons. Clinical signs can occur within 5 minutes after consumption of the plant. Death may occur within 15 minutes or several hours. The signs of poisoning may include:

- Salivation
- Labored breathing
- Muscle tremors
- Incoordination
- Bloating
- Sustained contraction of voluntary muscles
- Bright red venous blood
- Convulsions
- Death from respiratory failure

Integrated management strategies

Do not allow animals access to damaged leaves until the leaves are completely dry. Remove cattle from pastures when *Prunus* is

being bulldozed to prevent access to the damaged plant material.

Rapid intravenous treatment with sodium nitrite and then sodium thiosulfate is effective in animals showing clinical signs.

