



Climbing Bittersweet



Plant Characteristics

Celastrus scandens L.: Climbing bitterweet is a woody twiner with stems up to several yards long. These stems support alternately arranged, elliptical leaves and clusters of orange and scarlet fruits. The stems are green at first but become gray by the end of the season. The leaves, 2 to 4 inches long, are long-pointed at the apices and round-toothed on the margins. The whitish or greenish flowers are disposed in terminal clusters from 1 to 3 inches long.

Occurrence

Climbing bitterweet is a common plant of woodlands and fencerows. Its fruits are widely scattered by birds, and the plant ranges from Quebec to Ontario, Manitoba, and Wyoming, south to Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.

Conditions of Poisoning

Horses have occasionally been poisoned by eating climbing bitterweet leaves. Poisoning of sheep and cattle has also been reported.

Control

Although bitterweet poisoning is rare, the vine should be destroyed in all places where animals are grazed.

Toxic Principles

The toxic principle in climbing bitterweet is not definitely known, but it is thought to be the bitter substance euonymin.

Clinical Signs

Climbing bitterweet acts as a mild to severe purgative, and sometimes produces nausea and even prostration, depending upon the amount eaten. It also has a mild effect on the heart, somewhat like the effect of digitalis. The poisoning is not usually fatal.

Treatment

Move poisoned animals immediately to pasture where there is no climbing bitterweet. A veterinarian may administer other indicated treatment.

References

Evers, Robert A., and Roger P. Link. Poisonous Plants of the Midwest and Their Effects on Livestock, 1972. Special Publication 24, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Climbing Bittersweet
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