



# Horsenettle



Photo by: Larry Allain  
Hosted by the USDA-NRCS  
PLANTS Database

## Plant Characteristics

*Solanum carolinense*: This plant is in the nightshade family. This plant is sometimes called bull nettle, devil's potato and wild tomato. This is a perennial, thorny herb, .2 to .8 m tall that can spread by rhizomes and seeds. Leaves are alternate, simple, irregularly pinnately lobed, 7 to 12 cm long, 3 to 8 cm wide, stellate pubescent. The flowers are white to purple and are star shaped with five bright yellow anthers, 2.3 to 3.1 cm broad: borne in few-flowered, terminal racemes. Fruit is green, but turns yellow, like a small tomato, 1 to 1.5 cm in diameter. Plants are found throughout the south, but are also common in the Midwest in pastures, old fields, waste areas and sometimes in cultivated fields. Horsenettle is characterized by hard, sharp, yellowish spines found on the stems and leaves. They are easily found in pastures since most animals avoid eating it.

## Toxicity

All parts of the plant are poisonous, with the level of solanine being highest in the fall. Toxicity of these plants varies depending upon the maturity, environment and portion of the plant ingested. The berries are the most toxic when they are mature. The berries of both Carolina horsenettle and black nightshade are green when immature. However, the horsenettle berries turn yellow when mature and the black nightshade berries become black. The Leaves are toxic also, but to a lesser degree.

## Symptoms

All classes of livestock and humans have been poisoned by them. Two syndromes have been described: acute and chronic. The acutely poisoned animal is characterized by irritation of the mouth and gastrointestinal lesions. In the chronic form, unthriftiness, jaundiced mucous membranes (mouth and nostrils), abdominal dropsy and constipation have all been seen.

## Treatment

Non-specific.

## Information Sources

- Poisonous Plants of Southern United States
- <http://plants.usda.gov/>
- Bulletin 762 Horse Nutrition, Ohio State University.

