Weed focus: Bitter Sneezeweed

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Bitter sneeze weed (*Helenium amarum*) is a warm-season, annual, native plant with narrow leaves and a branching stem. It generally is 8 to 20 inches tall when mature. Lower leaves may be lost as the plant ages, especially in dry conditions. Bitter sneezeweed is related to sunflowers and has showy, yellow flowers each of which usually has about 8 petals with 3 lobes. Flowers appear in late summer.

Bitter sneezeweed likes disturbed, sandy or loamy soil; however, it can tolerate a wide variety of soil types. It is often indicative of poor pasture management and can quickly spread across over-grazed pasturelands.

This plant contains the lactone, tenulin, and the glycoside, dugaldin, which make it toxic to livestock. Fortunately, the plant is not palatable and so will only be consumed if no other forages are available. The toxin severely irritates mucous membranes and if consumed in significant quantities can lead to weakness, incoordination, vomiting, and diarrhea. If consumed by a lactating animal, it can lead to bitter, undrinkable milk. The meat from harvested animals which have consumed this plant may also be bitter.

Controlling bitter sneezeweed in pastures: Numerous options are available. Excellent control can be achieved with 2, 4-D, which targets broadleaf plants and will not kill grasses. If low enough rates are used, it might spare white clover. Dicamba will also kill bitter sneezeweed; however, it will also kill beneficial broadleaf plants, such as clover. Picloram or aminopyralid can be mixed with 2, 4-D for control as well. Timing of application matters. Spraying should be done when the plants are 2 to 4 inches tall and actively growing, so scouting for it mid- to late-summer is critical to applying herbicide at the most effective growth stage allowing successful control.

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