Weed focus: Prickly sida and arrowleaf sida

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Prickly sida (*Sida spinosa* L.) and arrowleaf sida (*Sida rhombifolia* L.) are common perennial weeds, especially in row crop fields in the south. They can also find their way into pastures, especially where grass stands are thin or where the pastures are overgrazed. Both are members of the mallow family (*Malvaceae*) and are native to North America. Both are erect and can grow to 3 feet in height. The plants look similar; however, the leaves of the arrowleaf sida (photo at right) are more diamond shaped than those of the prickly sida and are only serrated along the tip half of the leaf margin. Both plants have small spine-like projections at the base of their leaves, and both have small, yellow flowers (below). Mature plants have woody stems which can be used for making cordage, sacking, or brooms.

Sida has been eaten as food (leaves can contain 7 to 35% protein, 9 to 47% carbohydrate, and 1 to 7% fat). The root, however, is reported to have high concentrations of alkaloids reaching 450 ppm and the presence of choline, pseudoephedrine, and other potentially dangerous compounds. It has been cultivated and used medicinally in India to relieve swelling, headaches, and other infirmities. Livestock tend to avoid this plant if other choices are available.

<u>Controlling prickly sida in pastures</u>: As is commonly the case with pastureland weeds, sida control begins with prevention. Keeping a thick, healthy stand of grass will allow the desirable plants to out-compete sida. Once established, sida can present a challenge for control. Mowing may not be effective because of sida's woody stems. (Arrowleaf sida is called "ironweed" in some places because its tough stems. It is not to be confused with tall ironweed, which is different species.) Few herbicides provide good control of sida unless they are applied in a timely manner. Applications must be made before the plants are 3 inches tall to achieve good control. Aminopyralid herbicides are required or aminopyralid with metsulfuron or 2,4-D.

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