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## Bitter sneezeweed (bitterweed)

### *Helenium amarum*



Annual, 15 cm to 1 m tall, much branched herb with taproot. Stem leaves narrow, numerous, 2 to 7 cm long, 1 to 4 mm wide; bases not continuing as lines down the stem. Leaves, when crushed, have a strong disagreeable odor. Flower similar to *H. autumnale*. Found Virginia to Florida to Texas and extending into southern parts of adjacent northern states; most abundant in Coastal Plain where it is common in pastures, roadsides, and waste places. [Inset: flower]

### Toxicity

The toxic principles are the glucoside sesquiterpene lactone and a phenol. Bitter sneezeweed causes less severe symptoms than does autumn sneezeweed. The plant retains its toxicity even after drying; therefore, heavily contaminated hay can cause problems. Most cases occur when animals are on summer pasture and other forage is not available.

### Symptoms

Bitter sneezeweed is a severe irritant to the mucous membranes. Dullness, trembling, and weakness are first symptoms. In many instances, vomiting is prominent. For this reason, the illness is called "spewing sickness." Many vomiting animals inhale part of the regurgitated material into the trachea and develop inhalation pneumonia. These animals usually survive only to become chronically poor performers and perhaps die later from secondary ailments.

Bitterweed can cause similar problems under experimental conditions. Cattle consume bitterweed only if other forage is unavailable.

### Treatment

There is no effective treatment.

Remove from source. Feed high protein feed, mineral supplement of 75 pounds salt and 25 pounds dicalcium phosphate; or feed sodium sulfate.