

## Common cocklebur *Xanthium strumarium*



Coarse, widely branching annual herb 0.2 to 1.7 m tall. Leaves alternate, simple, coarsely pubescent, shallowly three to five lobed. Flowers green, inconspicuous, male and female borne in separate clusters. Fruit a broadly cylindrical to nearly spherical, spiny bur, 1.5 to 3 cm long (including spines), containing two seedlike nutlets, greenish to brown at maturity.

Found throughout the South; most abundant in fertile soil gardens, fields, roadsides, and other areas having nearly full sunlight. [Inset: seed and seedlings]

### Toxicity

The toxic principle is the glycoside carboxyotractyloside. It is concentrated in the seeds and seedlings (cotyledon state). Mature plants are distasteful to animals and contain less of the toxin.

Swine are the animals most commonly poisoned. They root up and ingest the two-leaf stage of the plant in the springtime. Chickens and other livestock have also been poisoned.

### Symptoms

Symptoms include vomiting and gastrointestinal irritation with occasional diarrhea. Large amounts often cause nervous symptoms, including spasmodic running movements and convulsions.

### Treatment

Treatment is of little or no value once symptoms have been observed. Try neutralizing the toxin with vegetable oil, whole milk or cream, or activated charcoal.