



Weed of The Week

Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*)

Common pokeweed is sometimes referred to as pokeberry, inkberry, and even pigeonberry. Pokeweed is an erect herbaceous perennial shrub that grows anywhere from 4 to 10 feet tall at maturity. This plant is easy to identify by its purple-black berries and smooth bright reddish-purple stem. Leaves are large, up to 1 foot in length and are hairless. Pokeberry flowers are small and a light green to white in color. The distinctive berries start out as a green color and mature to a very dark purple or even black. Common pokeweed is considered a poisonous plant. It contains phytolaccatoxin and related triterpene saponins and the roots, shoots, leaves and berries all contain some level of toxins. The most poisonous plant part is the root. Pokeweed can be fatal to livestock if consumed, especially the roots. The ripe berries are the least poisonous part of the plant and are eaten by several birds.

Pokeweed can be a competitive weed in row crops. The dark colored berries can also stain soybeans, causing dockage at the elevator. This plant is often found near fencerows, along roadsides, in agronomic crops, and in forests. Hand pulling is effective in smaller plants, if the root is fully removed. Digging out established plants with a shovel can be effective if the entire root system is removed, which is often difficult during dry summers. A non-chemical method would be to cut the plant several times each growing season until it exhausts the energy stored in the taproot. Treating individual plants with the systemic herbicides glyphosate, 2, 4-D, or triclopyr can be effective. These herbicides can be applied to the foliage or to the cut stump after manually removing the stalk.

