



Senna occidentalis

PEA FAMILY

Fabaceae; subfamily: Caesalpinioideae

COMMON NAMES

English: ant bush, arsenic bush, coffee senna, sicklepod, stinkweed.

DESCRIPTION

Annual or lives for more than one year but less than two, erect herb or shrub (0.5–2.5 m tall); stems reddish-purple, smooth, hairless or sparsely hairy, four-angled or grooved when young becoming greenish-brown and rounded.

Leaves: Green, once-divided (15–20 cm long), with 3–5 pairs of oppositely held egg-shaped or oval leaflets (3–10 cm long and 2–3 cm wide) with broad and rounded bases, tapering towards the end with pointed tips; conspicuous gland at the base of each leaf stalk; alternately held on stems on reddish stalks (3–5 cm long).

Flowers: Bright yellow (20–30 mm across) in small clusters of 2–6 flowers in forks of uppermost leaves.

Fruits: Pods (several-seeded dry fruits that split open at maturity), green turning brown as they mature, flattened, slightly curled (75–130 mm long and 8–10 mm wide), held upright.

ORIGIN

Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Coffee substitute, medicine and ornament.

INVADES

Roadsides, wasteland, disturbed land, fallow land, managed pastures, drainage ditches, woodland edges/gaps, savannah, riparian vegetation and gullies.

IMPACTS

Dense stands can displace native plant species, and reduce livestock carrying capacities in managed and natural pastures. Being allelopathic, it inhibits the germination and growth of other plants. Studies have shown that it has a negative impact on maize (Arora, 2013) and cotton yields (Higgins *et al.*, 1986), and is an alternative host for crop diseases (Suteri *et al.*, 1979). The seeds of *S. occidentalis* are highly toxic, containing compounds that damage the liver, the vascular system and the heart and lungs of domestic livestock, often leading to death in cattle (Barros *et al.*, 1999), horses (Riet-Correa *et al.*, 1998), goats (Suliman *et al.*, 1982; Suliman and Shommein, 1986), pigs (Martins *et al.*, 1986), poultry (Haraguchi *et al.*, 1998), and rabbits (O'Hara and Pierce, 1974). Consumption of the seeds in western Uttar Pradesh, in India, resulted in the deaths of nine children within five days (Vashishtha *et al.*, 2007).



Senna occidentalis (L.) Link

