

## ***Sarcostemma australae***

### **Common name:**

Caustic vine, Caustic bush,  
Pencil caustic, Milk vine,

### **Palatability to Livestock:**

Moderate.

### **Toxicity to Goats:**

Low risk.

### **Toxicity to Other Species:**

Toxic to sheep, cattle, horses.

### **Poisonous Principle:**

Saponins, steroid glycosides.

### **Effects:**

#### *Signs and symptoms;*

- . Restlessness,
- . Staggering and collapse,
- . Rapid breathing, paddling legs,
- . Jaws may be clamped shut, salivate heavily,
- . Seizures, convulsions, limb paddling.

#### *Health and Production Problems;*

- . Animals with mild symptoms usually recover.
- . Those with severe problems, die.

### **Treatment;**

- . Keep stock out of paddocks with this plant in drought times.
- . Can be controlled by mechanical removal, however sap can cause severe irritation and burning of skin and eyes.

### **Integrated Control Strategy:**

- . Physically remove the plant.
- . Take care with caustic sap.

### **Comments:**

- . A leafless scrambler or bush, with smooth, jointed, succulent stems, covered with a bloom, forming an untidy shrub.

- . Variable in habit from an erect shrub on exposed beaches, to a climbing tangled vine in less exposed sites.
- . There are no obvious leaves, and they consist only of smooth, jointed, pencil-sized succulent stems, containing a milky sap.
- . Stems may climb up trees, or form a bush.
- . Sap is milky and corrosive to the skin.
- . Flowers are pale green to cream-white, star shaped and waxy, in clusters at the stem joints; usually spring and autumn flowering.
- . Pods split to release flat tufted seeds.
- . Found in all mainland states, except Victoria.
- . Most common in tropical and sub tropical areas.
- . Rarely grazed except in very dry seasons when fodder is scarce.
- . Fresh shoots may be more toxic than the old shoots.
- . NB can be confused with *Euphorbia sarcostemmoides* which has a similar appearance.
- . Native to northern Australia.



Picture: griffith.edu.au

### **Further Reading:**

- . Cunningham, Mulham, Milthrop and Leigh. Plants of Western NSW. 1999.
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- . Shepherd. Pretty but Poisonous. 2004.
- . Australian Native Plants. Wrigley and Fagg. 1988