

Hedge-apples Are Ripening

October 2011



A fruit that is sure to peak your curiosity if you've ever saw one. It's approximately four to five inches, green and turns yellow in the fall with a knotty and bumpy texture. The fruit is made up of many drupes, much like a blackberry, that extend toward the center. According to Amber, my daughter, it looks like a pineapple on the inside when sliced. Some call it an Osage-orange and others call it a hedge-apple. For those plant enthusiasts that want to do some research, the latin name is *Maclura pomifera*. It is of really no value as a landscape plant, but will occasionally be found in a pasture.

The tree is a small to medium size tree, potentially reaching a height of 20 to 40 feet. It only produces fruit on the female tree. The stems have spines and contain a milky sap that can be irritating to the skin. It is a native of an area between Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas but has spread throughout the United States. According to B. Rosie Lerner, an Extension Consumer Horticulturalist with Purdue University, this plant was used extensively in the Midwest as a hedge due to its thorny nature, adaptability to different soils, and fast growth.

Occasionally, I get a call from a horse owner about this fruit. They usually want to know if these bumpy green fruit in their pasture are toxic to their horses. The hedge-apple or Osage-orange has not been linked to any livestock poisoning. The concern with livestock is choking as livestock including horses will occasionally try to eat one of these fruit. According to a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension article written by Dr. Barbara Ogg, the hedge-apple or Osage-orange is not an important source of food for wildlife, but the tree does provide some nesting habitat and cover for wildlife.

This fruit has also been rumored to repel insects. The article by Ogg says that some homeowners have been known to place the fruit in basements around the foundation or vents in an attempt to keep insects out. The article says that research done by Iowa State University found that compounds found in the fruit were only an effective repellent when extracted and then concentrated. The wood is extremely resistant to rot and has been used for fence posts. Lerner also noted the wood has been used for archery bows and furniture.

This is just one of those unusual, but otherwise useless plants in our landscape. Just as my friend asked, "What is that?" I thought you might want to know as well.