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Sicklepod

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Sicklepod *Senna obtusifolia* (L.)

Also known as *coffeebean*, *Java bean*, *Cassia obtusifolia* (L.), *Cassia tora* (L.)

Classification and Description

Sicklepod is a member of the *Fabaceae* (Leguminosae) or bean (pea) family. Sicklepod is an annual, herbaceous to semi-woody plant that is thought to be native to the American tropics. It can be found throughout the southeastern United States. The cotyledons of sicklepod are rounded and have three to five distinct veins. The stems are erect, branched, lack hairs (glabrous) and can reach heights of 1 - 6 feet. Sicklepod has alternate leaves comprised of 4 - 6 leaflets that are egg-shaped and arranged pinnately compound, which means that the leaflets are opposite one another. The pair of leaflets furthest from the main stem is the largest and the pair closest to the stem is the smallest. The egg-shaped leaflets can be 1 - 3.5 inches long. This weed reproduces by seed. The brownish seeds are housed in long (4 - 8 inches), sickle-shaped, hairless pods. Pods are a typical fruiting structure of a legume. Flowers have distinctive yellow petals and one or two arise from leaf axils (where stem meets leaf). Sicklepod has a stout taproot. This weed can be easily confused with coffee senna (*Cassia occidentalis*). However, the leaves of sicklepod are blunt while coffee senna's are pointed.

Weed Status and Injury

Sicklepod can be found in Tennessee in agronomic crops, waste places, moist forests and barnyards. Sicklepod can be a weed pest in cotton, corn, and soybeans. Sicklepod has been found to reduce cotton yield by 2.79 percent per weed per 30 row-feet. The critical time of control is the first four weeks after planting in most crops. Sicklepod can survive in a shaded environment but loses some competitive advantage once a crop has shaded the soil. It is one of the world's worst weeds.

Interesting Facts

Though sicklepod is a legume, it does not fix nitrogen. *Senna* is from ancient Greek and means an aromatic plant. This is in reference to sicklepod being rank-smelling when crushed. The Latin *obtusifolia* refers to the shape of the leaflets (*obtus* blunt and *folia* leaves or blunt



Newly emerged sicklepod



First true leaf

leaves). Sicklepod seeds have had medicinal properties since 4000 B.C. when they were used as laxatives. Sicklepod hosts several insects and diseases of agricultural importance, including Asian soybean rust.

Management Considerations

Sicklepod is a very common weed in Tennessee row crop agriculture. It can be very competitive to cotton, soybeans and corn. Fortunately, a number of herbicides that can be sprayed on various crops provide good control of this weed. Please refer to the *Weed Control Manual for Tennessee Row Crops* (UT Extension PB 1580) for specific herbicides and management recommendations within various crops.

References

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Sicklepod competing with cotton



Sicklepod in cotton