

## CASTOR OIL PLANT

*Ricinus communis*

SHRUB

**Family** Euphorbiaceae**Origin** Tropical Asia and Africa

**Description** A large evergreen shrub that grows to a height of 3m and a spread of 2m<sup>1</sup>. This tree is a problem on the north and central coast of NSW invading highly disturbed areas in or near hind-dunes, roadsides and bushland<sup>2</sup>.

**Stems/Leaves** The erect stem is stout and branching<sup>1</sup>. Alternate, glossy reddish brown to green leaves with 7-9 triangular lobes. The leaves have serrated edges and conspicuous veins<sup>13</sup>.

**Flowers** The flowers are red, large and woolly and occur in clusters<sup>1</sup>. Flowers bloom in summer<sup>2</sup>.

**Fruit/Seed** The fruit are hard spiny capsules<sup>2</sup>. The burr-like fruits contain 3 smooth mottled seeds that are dispersed by the exploding fruit as it ripens. In addition to castor oil, the seeds contain ricin a toxin used in industry as a purgative. The seeds can affect the skin and the ingestion of two to eight seeds may be fatal for humans. Poisoning in livestock is uncommon<sup>6</sup>. The seed pod explodes when ripe, scattering the seeds. Although rodents and birds may disperse some seeds, man is the principal agent<sup>17</sup>.

**Removal techniques**

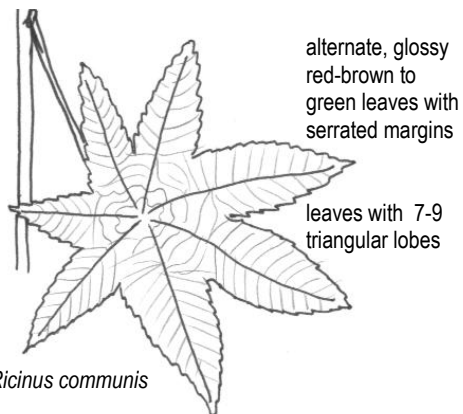
**Manual** Hand pull plants or use a mattock. Bag all seed heads<sup>2</sup>.

**Chemical** A number of chemical controls are available<sup>2</sup>. Cut and paint stems of mature plants with 100% RoundUp. Spray young plants with 1:100 RoundUp<sup>13</sup>.

**Maintenance** The seeds respond well to disturbance and returning to the site every 3 months for follow up work with regrowth is a good idea<sup>13</sup>.

**Notes**

The Castor Oil Plant has been referred to as the KGB plant. Apparently it was used as a form of truth serum during the cold war<sup>13</sup>.

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