



# Castor oil plant

*Ricinus communis*



## Description

Castor oil plant *Ricinus communis* is a tall, branching perennial shrub which grows to 3 m high and occasionally higher. It has stout hollow branches which are a dull pale green or red; older branches and trunks turn greyish.

Large leaves (10–60 cm across) are widely spaced on the branches and grow on long, stout, hollow stalks attached off-centre to the bottom of the leaf. Each leaf is divided into 7–9 pointed triangular segments with toothed edges and conspicuous veins. Leaves are glossy, dark reddish-green when young, glossy green when mature.

The flowers are crowded in stout, erect spikes in the forks of the upper branches. Female flowers are in the upper part of the spikes, male flowers at the base.

Female flowers develop into fruits about 2.5 cm across which are covered with soft green or red spines. These fruits have three segments, each segment containing one large, mottled, smooth seed. When ripe, the fruits explode violently and throw the seeds a distance of several metres.

The name castor oil plant is sometimes mis-applied to bellyache bush *Jatropha gossypifolia*. Bellyache bush can be found in similar habitats but is usually smaller than castor oil plant, has leaves with only three smooth, rounded lobes, and small, smooth fruits found in clusters in the upper parts of the plant.

## Distribution and habitat

Castor oil plant is native to Africa and Asia, and is now naturalised throughout Australia. It is often abundant along watercourses and floodplains, disturbed or waste land, and roadsides. It may be common locally after heavy rains or floods.

## Declaration

Castor plant is not declared under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*. Castor oil plant is recognised as a problem plant and its removal is encouraged.

## The problem

Castor oil plant spreads over sandy soil areas, creek banks, and gullies. This can lead to a significant loss of prime grazing land.

The seeds of castor oil contain ricin, a poison which is extremely toxic to livestock and humans. Leaves have a lesser amount of toxin. Symptoms of poisoning in animals usually do not appear for a few hours or several days.



Seeds cause gastro-intestinal disorders; leaves tend to cause neuro-muscular disorders. Poisoning in livestock is rarely reported though, as castor oil plant is seldom grazed by stock when other pasture plants are available. Also, small amounts of the plant will induce an immunity to poisoning.

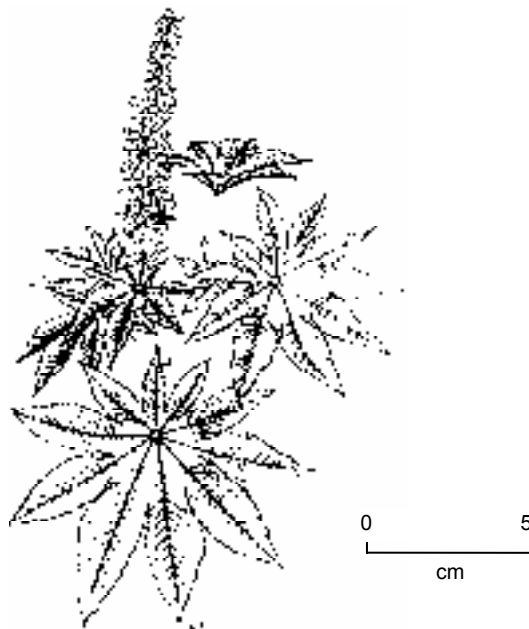
## Control

Individual plants or small infestations may be removed by cultivation or hand-pulling. Broad-scale infestations may require spraying with herbicides to control the plant.

Herbicides registered for the control of castor oil plant are given in the table below.

## Further information

Further information is available from the vegetation management/weed control/environmental staff at your local government. ■



**TABLE 1 – HERBICIDES REGISTERED FOR THE CONTROL OF CASTOR OIL PLANT**

Application method	Tradename/ Herbicide	Rate	Comments
Foliar (overall spray)	2,4-D amine	4.2 L/ha	Add wetting agent Spray plant to point of runoff
Basal spray/cut stump	Garlon 600/Triclopyr	1.7 L per 100 L diesel	Basal spray around entire base of plant to a height of 40 cm when plant is actively growing  Cut stump at any time of year, but treat stump immediately after cutting

Fact sheets are available from NRW service centres and the NRW Information Centre phone (07 3237 1435). Check our web site <[www.nrw.qld.gov.au](http://www.nrw.qld.gov.au)> to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this Pest Fact should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the utilisation of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, the Department of Natural Resources and Water does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

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