

# Abrus precatorius

**Precatory bean, black-eyed susan, bead vine, rosary pea**

*Abrus precatorius* L.

Family: Fabaceae

**Description:** Vine or climbing shrub, stems to 30 ft long. Pinnately compound leaves, leaflets 16–40, oblong, 0.25–1 inch long, upper surface darker green, lower surface with sparse brownish hairs, soft spine-like appendage at apex. Flowers 0.5 inches long, yellow, white, pink or purple in 4-inch long inflorescence with thick stem (axis). Pods to 2 inches long by 0.5 inches wide, somewhat swollen, beaked, splits open at maturity, twists and curls exposing seeds; both pods and seeds persist on the vine. Seeds about 5 per pod, 0.25 inches long by 0.2 inches wide, ovoid, scarlet with shiny black area where it attaches to the pod, sometimes yellowish. Seeds poisonous to stock, hence a pasture weed<sup>(29)</sup>. Seeds used as prayer beads, ornaments, and, in parts of Asia, as standard weights because of their uniformity<sup>(59)</sup>. Air-dried seeds weigh about 0.1 gram each. Name from the Greek *habros*, soft; possibly because of texture of the leaves<sup>(70)</sup>; *precatorius*, prayerful<sup>(69)</sup>, presumably because the seeds were used as prayer beads.

**Distribution:** Native to the rim of the Indian Ocean. A weed in Florida<sup>(30)</sup>. In Hawai‘i, a weed of drier pastures and non-cropland. Occurs in dry disturbed sites on all inhabited islands except O‘ahu. Naturalized prior to 1871<sup>(70)</sup>.



**Environmental impact:** Seeds contain abrin, which is very poisonous, thus a threat to children and livestock<sup>(75, 29)</sup>.

**Management:** Probably sensitive to foliar sprays of triclopyr. Good control with triclopyr ester at 10% in oil applied to basal bark or cut surface and with triclopyr amine at 50% in water applied to cut surface<sup>(30)</sup>.