

Ricinus communis

Castor bean

Ricinus communis L.

Family: Euphorbiaceae

Description: Semiwoody shrub, branched in upper part, 10 ft tall, stem internodes hollow. Leaves broad, up to 2 ft long, almost as wide, 6–7 lobes, leaf stem attached to underside of leaf (peltate). Flowers in clusters, small, whitish, not showy. Fruit in upright clusters, a capsule, nearly spherical, splits explosively. Seed mottled. *Ricinus* is the Latin name of the castor bean, which in turn is the name of a tick which the seed resembles; *communis*, common. The source of castor oil, castor bean also has commercial value for making soap, margarine, lubricants, paints, inks, plastics, and linoleum, although not commercially utilized in Hawai‘i^(5, 70).

Distribution: Originally from Africa, now on all the main Hawaiian islands in dry-mesic disturbed habitats. Widespread problem of wastelands, roadsides, and riverbanks in South Africa⁽²²⁾. Naturalized prior to 1819⁽⁷⁰⁾.

Environmental impact: Encroaches into dryland forests. Contains natural toxin ricin in seed coat. Extremely poisonous to animals and humans. However, cattle and goats will strip the castor bean plant of all its the leaves.



Management: Sensitive to 2,4-D and other hormone-type herbicides. Triclopyr ester, 10% product in oil applied basal bark, provided good control⁽³⁰⁾. HAVO staff reported control with foliar application of triclopyr ester at 1% of product or with cut-stump application of triclopyr amine at 10% of product (Chris Zimmer, HAVO). Small populations can be controlled by hand pulling. Larger infestations can be controlled by repeated cultivation⁽⁶¹⁾.