

WEED NOTE Mid-West

Castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*)

FAMILY: Euphorbiaceae

STATUS: Alien, invasive (spreads rapidly)².

TYPE: Erect/sprawling, perennial shrub/tree.

IDENTIFICATION: *Ricinus communis* (castor oil plant) has palmate leaves with 5-9 serrated lobes, each containing a prominent mid vein that connects to the point of the central stalk².

DESCRIPTION: Castor oil plant grows up to 3 m high and has stout hollow branches that are a dull reddish brown colour⁴. Plants have large leaves that are glossy, dark reddish green when young and a glossy green when mature. Flowers produced are about 2.5 cm across and are covered with soft green or red spines³.

DISTRIBUTION: Castor oil plant is a native of Africa and Eurasia².

PREFERRED HABITAT: Castor oil plant is most commonly found in disturbed areas, road and rail verges, rivers and creeks¹.

KNOWN LOCATIONS IN WA:

Castor oil plant has been recorded over a large area from Esperance to Kununurra¹.



Plate 1: Mature plant



Plate 2: Immature fruit



Plate 3: Flower



Plate 4: Distinguishing feature

THREAT/ IMPACT: Environmental and Agricultural

Castor oil plant seedlings have the potential to grow quickly and establish deep taproot systems that may out-compete native species². Seeds of this plant are extremely poisonous and have been known to kill birds that have been fed contaminated grain¹. Plants also contain milky sap stored in their stems which can cause a nasty rash if it comes in contact with skin².

References

- 1 Hussey B.M.J, Keighery, G.J., Dodd, J., Lloyd, S.G., Cousens, R.D., (2007). Western Weeds A Guide to the Weeds of Western Australia, (2nd Edition), Weeds Society of Western Australia, Victoria Park, Western Australia.
- 2 Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (2011). Castor oil plant and its control. Accessed from: <http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/objtwr/imported_assets/content/pw/weed/fn_control_castor_oil_plant.pdf>. [12 October 2012].
- 3 Weeds Australia (2012). *Ricinus communis*. Accessed from: <<http://www.weeds.org.au/cgi-bin/weedident.cgi?tpl=plant.tpl&ibra=all&card=505>>. [3 October 2012].
- 4 Department of Primary Industries - Queensland (2012). *Ricinus communis*. Accessed from: <http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/documents/Biosecurity_EnvironmentalPests/IPA-Castor-Oil-Bush-PP44.pdf>. [3 October 2012].

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