**Ricinus communis**

**Common name:**
Caster oil plant,

**Palatability to Livestock:**
High at all stages.

**Toxicity to Goats:**
Low risk.

**Toxicity to Other Species:**
Potentially toxic to sheep, cattle, horses, pigs, poultry, and humans.

**Poisonous Principle:**
. Phytotoxins.
. Ricin and ricinine in seeds.

**Effects:**
*Signs and symptoms:*
. Inhibits protein synthesis → cell necrosis.
. Loss of appetite,
. Abdominal discomfort, diarrhoea,
. Dullness, weakness,
. Rapid, loud heart beat,
. Trembling and Incoordination.

**Health and Production Problems:**
Death can occur, but slow recovery is more likely. A purgative. Allergic skin reactions.

**Treatment:**
. Be aware of potential health problems.
. Flowers and seeds are toxic.

**Integrated Control Strategy:**
. Use goats.
. Dig out, slash.
. Glyphosate on cut stumps.
. 2,4-D on young plants.
. Declared a “Noxious” weed in Queensland.

**Comments:**
. Garden plant gone feral
. A large perennial shrub, up to 2.5m high.
. Branches are thick, hollow, dull pale green.

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. Leaves alternate, very large, serrated, lobed, widely spaced on the branches, stalk attached off-centre is dark reddish brown to glossy green when mature, has a bad smell when crushed.
. Ricin a blood coagulant, takes some time to show symptoms, vomiting, diarrhoea, cold sweats, burning sensation in mouth, thirst.
. In severe cases, skin turns blue, and heart malfunctions, convulsions, death, respiratory failure and cardiac arrest.
. Flowers in erect spikes in forks of upper branches, female red upper, male yellow below; these flowers are also toxic.
. Fruits, a spiny, 3-lobed capsule, explode when ripe. Shiny mottled seeds are toxic, 2-8 can kill a human.
. Caster oil, a laxative, is extracted from the seeds.
. Native to Asia and Africa, found in all states in disturbed areas, creek beds, etc.
. Horses are most susceptible, cattle and sheep less so. Animals may develop an immunity.

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Picture: Ricinus communis
Helen Simmonds. Calga NSW.

**Further Reading:**
. Huggins and Lucy. Weeds of Southern Qld 1997
. McKenzie R Veterinary Clinical Toxicology 2000
. Shepherd. Pretty but Poisonous. 2004