PLANT FACT SHEET

Poisonous

This plant, or parts of it, can be poisonous. Do not eat it unless you know which parts are safe and how they must be prepared.

Ricinus communis L.

GENUS *Ricinus* **FAMILY** Euphorbiaceae

COMMON NAMES Castor bean, Castor Oil Plant

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Oil, Root, Seeds, Flowers

People in many PNG villages claim to eat the seeds, cooked. Apparently some less poisonous kinds occur.
The young leaves are cooked and eaten. The roots are also recorded as eaten raw.
CAUTION The plant is normally recorded as deadly poisonous especially seeds, so should never be eaten raw. The poisons are destroyed by heat.
An edible oil has been extracted from the plant. This must be refined before use. It is used for adding butter and nut flavours to foods including baked goods. The fruit are used for pickles.
In India the young fruit are cooked as a vegetable. Young flowers are cooked as a vegetable.

DESCRIPTION

A small evergreen tree. Often they are grown as annual plants. It grows up to about 6 m high and spreads to 2 m across. The stem is erect, stout and branching. The plant can form suckers. It has leaves with pointy lobes spreading out like fingers on a hand. The leaves are large and glossy. The leaves are on long leaf stalks. The flowers are red and large and woolly. Female flowers are at the top and male flowers lower down. Clusters of flowers produce seed capsules containing 3 spiny seeds. Several different cultivated varieties exist which are chosen for their leaf and flower colour.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It occurs throughout the country of Papua New Guinea up to about 2000 m altitude. It does well in humid areas but needs a well drained soil. It is tolerant to drought and light frost. It needs an open sunny position. It suits hardiness zones 9-12. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown from seed. Often plants are self sown. Seed should be sown directly where the plants are to grow. Seed should be soaked for 24 hours before sowing.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Plants are fast growing. On poor soils plants produce flowers rather than leaves.

NOTES

There is only one Ricinus species. It can be invasive. The poison ricin in the seeds in soluble in water and not in the processed oil.
Medicine,

PICTURES



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