PLANT FACT SHEET

Crotalaria retusa L.

GENUS *Crotalaria* **FAMILY** Fabaceae

COMMON NAMES Wedge-leafed rattlepod

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Seeds, Flowers, Vegetable

CAUTION: It causes cirrhosis of the liver.
The leaves have been recorded as eaten.
The flowers are cooked as a vegetable or pickled following boiling.

DESCRIPTION

An annual plant. It grows to 1-1.5 m high and spreads to 1 m across. The stems are erect and slender. The branches are stiff, and shortly hairy. The leaves are oblong to sword shaped, with a blunt end. They are 3-8 cm long by 1-2.5 cm wide. The leaves are green above and pale underneath. They have a short leaf stalk. The flowers occur in clusters 15-30 cm long. These are at the ends of branches. The flowers are yellow and pea shaped. They are 1.5-2 cm long. The fruit are pods 2-5 cm long which are black when ripe. The pods are spreading at right angles. The seeds are golden brown and about 4 mm long.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. It grows in light, well-drained soils. It prefers an open sunny position. It is drought resistant but frost tender. They occur naturally in moist, sandy, patches on flood plains of large rivers. In Papua New Guinea it is mostly in places at low altitude where there is a low and seasonal rainfall. It grows in Nepal to about 200 m altitude in open places. It suits hardiness zones 10-11.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are grown from seed which needs treatment to enable it to grow.

NOTES

It has been blamed for poisoning horses in Australia. Alkaloids affect their livers. There are about 550 Crotalaria species. They are mostly tropical.

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