

Castor bean *Ricinus communis*



Large, robust annual (in the South) or perennial (in tropics and subtropics) woody herb, to 3 m tall. Leaves alternate, up to 40 cm long, simple, palmately seven to nine lobed, serrate with gland-tipped teeth. Flowers green, inconspicuous; staminate flowers near the base and pistillate flowers mostly near the top of a small panicle. Fruit a three-lobed capsule with a soft, spiny exterior, 1.5 to 2 cm long; seeds three per capsule, shiny,

grayish brown mottled with reddish brown, 10 mm long and 6 to 7 mm wide, each resembling a female tick. Found throughout the Southeast; cultivated and occasionally escaping and persisting in pinelands, waste places, and roadsides.

Toxicity

The poisonous principle is a phytotoxin called ricin. In the Southeast the plant is commonly planted not only as an ornamental but also in vegetable gardens to repel moles. Horses are most susceptible to poisoning, but all livestock and humans can be affected. All parts of the plant are toxic, especially the seeds. Toxicity is seen most often in spring and summer.

Symptoms

Animals are most often poisoned when feed grains have become contaminated with the castor bean seeds. Depending upon the amount consumed, symptoms appear several hours to several days after animals consume the toxin. Violent purgation in the form of straining and bloody diarrhea is the classical sign. Other signs are dullness, abdominal pain, weakness, trembling, and incoordination.

Treatment

Administer intestinal protectives in large amounts by stomach tube. If affected animal is dehydrated, provide large amounts of intravenous fluids.