

The California Invasive Plant Council Student Chapter recommends that you

**DON'T PLANT**

**CASTOR BEAN**



**Scientific Name:** *Ricinus communis*

**Other Common Names:** Castor Oil Plant, Palma Christi

**Description:**

Native to tropical Africa and Eurasia and can be a herbaceous perennial or even a small tree up to 10 feet tall. Not a true bean the castor plant has no soil-improving value. Although some varieties are cultivated as ornamentals or even for their seed oil, the species has escaped cultivation in many locations in the central and south coast of California and has become a common roadside, railway and wild land invasive.

**Biology, Habitat, and Spread:**

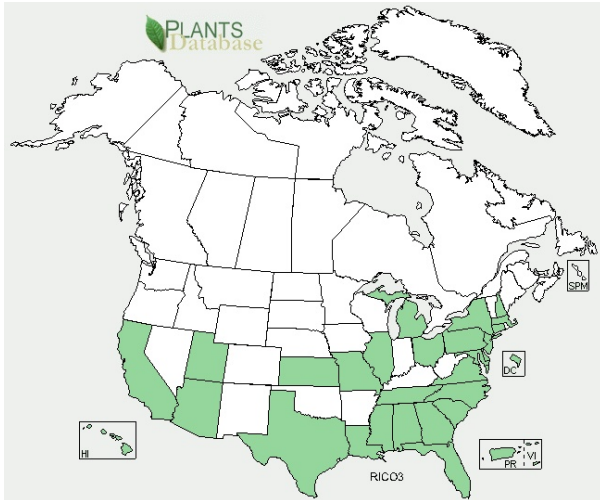
In temperate areas the plant grows as an annual shrub and grows in, old fields, garden edges, abandoned homestead sites and riparian zones. Castor bean seeds can be spread by moving water or transportation of soil. A mature female plant can have 1000 to 1500 seeds that are dispersed via wind pollination.

**Impact:**

Castor bean can easily form dense monoculture. The castor plant grows so rapidly that it shades out native seedlings and saplings. The seed absorbs water which enhances germination under conditions that would otherwise be too dry for most competing vegetation. The toxic oil produced by the plant is well recognized and can kill both animals and humans in small amounts.

**Native Range:** Ethiopia

**Invaded Range:**



**Control Methods:**

Due to its fast growing rate, using herbicide such as round-up, is most effective on large infested areas. Other chemicals include Glyphosate or picloram + 2,4-D applied as a foliar spray. For larger plants, slash and paint the stumps with picloram + 2,4-D or triclopyr. Hand pulling is effective to ensure root removal and prevent resprouting.

**Alternatives:**



**Cassava**  
*Manihot esculenta*

Cassava is a tall semiwoody perennial shrub or tree. Plants can grow more than 20 ft. The cassava has several edible parts that can be eaten after proper preparation. Cassava thrives on poor soils and needs almost no attention to produce bountiful crops of edible roots.



**Chaste Tree**  
*Vitex agnus-castus*

A little deciduous tree or large shrub with a showy summertime flower display. It is a sprawling plant that grows 10-20 ft and about as wide. It is also fragrant and attracts pollinating bees and hummingbirds to make hungry visits. The chaste tree is great to plant against borders and create high margins.

Photo: Sten Porse



**Tree Philodendron**  
*Philodendron bipinnatifidum*

It grows as a woody shrub. It has huge leaves and one stem that does not branch. It can get to 10' tall and 15' wide. It grows best in moist, but well drained soil. It does not want full sun, dappled to part shade is best. This plant is not drought tolerant, so water when times are dry.

Photo: www.herselfhoustongarden.com

**References:**

Cal-IPC: [www.cal-ipc.org](http://www.cal-ipc.org)

USDA Plant Database: <http://plants.usda.gov/>

Forest Service: <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/iitf/pdf/shrubs/Ricinus%20communis.pdf>