

# Castor Oil Plant

*Ricinus communis*



## What is Castor Oil?

*Ricinus communis* is a native of tropical Asia and Africa but was introduced into Australia where it has now become a common weed, invading disturbed roadsides, bushland and creek banks.

The Castor Oil Plant is a large shrub, growing up to 4 metres. The stems are hollow and pale green, occasionally tinged with red. The leaves are large (10 – 40 cm long), palm-shaped, glossy reddish brown with obvious veins. Flowers are also reddish green and are held in clusters at the ends of the branches in summer. Seeds are held in a reddish green spiny fruit capsule in autumn and are dispersed by water and wind.



## Why does it need to be removed?

Under the Noxious Weed Act 1993, Castor Oil Plant is declared noxious in many areas including The City of Botany Bay. It is classified as a W2 Noxious weed, meaning that it **must be fully and continuously suppressed and destroyed**. This means that if you have Castor Oil growing on your property, you are legally required to remove it.

This weed is widely distributed by seeds on vehicle tyres, grows to maturity at a rapid rate and is highly adaptable. All these characteristics make Castor Oil capable of completely dominating the native vegetation of an area. The seeds are toxic to both animals and humans.



## Removing Castor Oil

Before attempting to remove a Castor Oil Plant, remove and bag the seed heads to ensure that the toxic seeds are not spread during the removal process. Small plants can be easily pulled out by hand. However for larger plants, a mattock may be required to dig out the root system. Be sure to remove the entire root system so that it will not re-sprout. Chemical removal of Castor Oil using herbicides such as "Roundup Bioactive" (glyphosate) is also effective. The plant can be cut to stump and

allowed to re-shoot. After a couple of months, the plant can then be sprayed (see Information Sheet, *'Removing Weeds from Your Garden'* – available from Council). When using a herbicide, be sure to follow the instruction on the label and wear protective gear during application. Due to an extensive seed bank in the soil, it is important to check for and spray any new seedlings that germinate after removal of the adult plant. Composting of Castor Oil plants is not recommended as seeds remaining in the compost may germinate.



## Replacing Castor Oil

There is a range of locally native shrubs, which are ideally suited to grow in the Botany Bay area, such as Tick Bush (*Kunzea Ambigua*), Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) or Bottlebrush (*Callistemon citrinus*).

These attractive shrubs require little maintenance once established and provide habitat for native birds. Information sheets on how to grow and care for these locally native species are available from Council.

### References and further information available at Pagewood Library:

- Mark A. Wolff, *Winning the War on Weeds*, 1999.
- Auld & Medd, *Weeds - An illustrated botanical guide to the weeds of Australia*, 1992.
- Whibley & Christensen, *Garden Weeds - Identification and Control*, 1991.
- Gwen Elliot, *Australian Plants for the Garden*, 1998.

**For further information please contact  
Council's Health and Environmental  
Services Department on 9366 3666.**