Ricinus communis   *Euphorbiaceae*

Indigenous to Africa

Common names:	**English:** Castor oil plant **Luganda:** Nsogasoga **Runyankore:** Kasyoga, kaisaja.
Ecology:	A shrubby tree growing over a wide range of altitudes, preferring humus-rich and disturbed ground. In Uganda it is widely cultivated and sometimes regenerates naturally in secondary scrub and gaps in forests.
Uses:	Medicine (castor oil), oil (seeds).
Description:	An evergreen shrub or tree to 5 m (many different varieties). **Stems often red,** hollow with age, well-marked leaf nodes and leaf scars. LEAVES: large compound **palmate leaves to 50 cm across** with **5-11 lobes,** the **edge toothed,** on a long hollow leaf stalk. Young leaves soft, shiny, dark red-green above. FLOWERS: crowded on upright spikes to 60 cm, male flowers with **creamy-yellow stamens** at the base; female flowers with soft green spines and 3 bright red divided stigmas at the top. FRUIT: round, **green-brown capsules,** spiny, to 2.5 cm across, split to set free **3 seeds,** grey-purple-brown, shiny and spotted with a small white structure (caruncle) at one end.
Propagation:	Seedlings, direct sowing on site.
Seed:	Collect mature fruits before they split open,
treatment:	not necessary,
storage:	stores well for 2-3 years.
Management:	Fast growing.
Remarks:	The plant is drought and termite resistant. The seed coat and leaves are poisonous to animals and to poultry, and even the oil residue can only be used as stock feed if specially treated. It can, however, be used as a fertilizer. The seeds yield up to 50% oil, an oil that has many industrial uses. For medicinal purposes, the oil extract is heated to neutralize the strong poison, ricin. Even a few seeds can kill if they are chewed—so take care with children. The oil is best used as a body lotion but it was commonly used as a purgative in the Western world until better products replaced it. The fruits are used to treat snake bite. In the late fifties sale of Ricinus seed was a profitable business for rural farmers in Uganda. Seeds used to be exported to Japan.

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flowers

fruit
capsules

seed

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