

Genera and species

Abrus

Twining perennial. Leaves pinnate, lacking a terminal leaflet. Stamens 9, the filaments all joined in a dorsally split tube for $\frac{3}{4}$ their length. Style hairless.

Abrus precatorius (figure 1)
Crab's eye, precatory bean, rosary pea

Stems to 4m long, hairless or covered in small spreading hairs. Stipules 3-5mm long, hairy, narrow and pointed, adpressed, persistent. Petiole 5-20mm long, rachis 30-100mm long, both minutely but sparsely hairy. Stipels insignificant, 0.1-0.3mm long, present between each pair of leaflets. Leaflets 14-30, strictly opposite, 5-25mm long, 3-8mm wide, parallel sided or slightly broader towards the tip, rounded at each end, minutely and sparsely hairy on both surfaces, mucronate.



Abrus precatorius, Brisbane, 27°28'S, 152°57'E.

Inflorescence a dense raceme 15-50mm long on a 30-80mm peduncle borne in a leaf axil or at the end of a short lateral branch. Flowers borne in clusters on swellings on the raceme axis, each flower on a c. 1mm pedicel within the axil of a minute 0.5mm bract. Calyx minutely and sparsely hairy, c. 3mm long, the sepals totally fused and

the teeth evident as shallow lobes. Standard c. 8mm tall, 6mm wide, greenish white shading to purplish at the margins. Wings c. 12mm long from base of calyx, white to pale pink, slightly shorter than the white keel.

Pod 25-40mm long, with a hooked beak, 12-15mm wide, sparsely and minutely hairy, brown and woody when ripe, containing c. 3-7 seeds. When it splits, the seeds and pod persist on the plant for some months. Seeds 5-7mm long, 4-5mm wide, egg-shaped, shiny, black at the proximal end, clearly demarcated from the brilliant red or reddish brown at the distal end.

Distribution: Bk., Co., Mo., N.K., P.C., S.K. Also N.T., W.A., N.S.W., south and South-East Asia, Indonesia and Africa. Fairly common in coastal and near-coastal woodlands.

Notes: Not of agricultural significance. The seeds, which are used for necklaces and rosaries, contain the protein abrin and are extremely toxic. Self-pollinating, nodulates.

References: 3, 16, 17, 21, 23, 26, 50, 57, 70, 97, 108, 127, 130, 132, 139, 141, 153, 161, 276, 284, 285, 287, 306, 331.

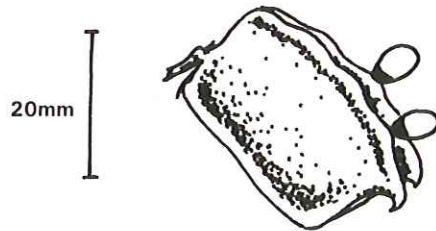


Figure 1. *Abrus precatorius*. Pod opened, but with seeds attached.