

Bottle Plant

(Jatropha podagrica)



Alternative Common Name

Buddha belly plant, gout plant, purging-nut, Guatemalan rhubarb, goutystalk nettlespurge, Bottel plant (Afrikaans).

Description

It is a tropical, frost sensitive, succulent shrub. The deciduous shrub grows 2 – 6m high and is drought resistant. It has a swollen and knobby grey-skinned stem and green, smooth waxy leaves up to 30cm in diameter. The stem is filled with thin sap. The plant bears bright red coral-like flowers throughout the year. Flowers could also be yellow in colour.

Where does this species come from?

This species comes from tropical America.

How does it spread?

Seeds are spread a short distance when they are explosively released, while most long range dispersal probably occurs in water or in mud, adhering to animals and vehicles. The spread of this species is also aided by its deliberate cultivation in home gardens.

Why is it a problem?

It has the potential to compete with and replace indigenous pioneering species, especially in water courses. All parts, especially the seeds, of the plant contain the toxic curcin, making it poisonous. The seeds are highly poisonous to humans, especially to children. As few as 1 – 3 seeds can cause a toxic reaction.

Additional information

It is known for its incredible ability to attract butterflies wherever it is grown.