

Rosary Pea (*Abrus precatorius*): One seed, if chewed, can be fatal to an adult.

This is one plant you do not want around, especially if you have children or horses. One seed, if chewed may cause the death of a grown man. If unchewed, the seed coat is rather tough, thankfully, and seeds may pass through with no harm. I recently had a call from an individual who caught his 18 month old child in the driveway with a seed in his mouth. Upon researching this plant, I was shocked at how toxic it is and am sounding the alarm to eliminate it. This seed produces abrin, one of the top deadly plant toxins, twice as deadly as ricin (from the castor bean plant). According to literature, studies have shown that as little as 0.00015% of toxin per body weight will cause human death. The child ended up being OK, as was the child in the Am. J. Case Reports referenced below.

This vine is a FLEPPC (Florida Exotic Plant Pest Council) Category 1 invasive plant. It can spread quickly and has deep roots.

Rosary peas is a legume with typical pods (1.5 to 2 inches long) in clusters, grey-green, densely velvety, drying brown to black and splitting and curling to reveal the bright red seeds with a black spot, hence another name, 'crab's eye'.

If you have a child that may have ingested some seeds, make a free call to the local Poison Control Center (PCC) at 1-800-222-1222 and if directed, get to a local Emergency Room. The PCC will track along with you as your situation develops. They will also help you with what to watch for and give you someone to call if you have any doubts.

If you near a natural area, scout your property closely for this vine-shrub, it grows up to 15 feet and tends to smother understory plants. Best approach, if you can try, is to dig up by the roots. Herbicide spot-treatments with glyphosate or triclopyr amine may be required if abundant. Check for current recommendations at your local UF|IFAS Extension office. Dispose of seeds in regular trash and not the yard waste trash.

References Cited:

Alhamdani, M., B. Brown and P. Narula. 2015. Abrin poisoning in an 18-month-old child. Am. J. Case Rep. 16:146-148.

Langeland, K.A. and K. Craddock Burks, editors. 1998. Identification and Biology of Non-native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. IFAS Publication SP257. University of Florida. 165 pp. (76-77).

Doug Caldwell is a landscape entomologist and works for the Cooperative Extension Service, which is an off-campus branch of the University of Florida, Institute of the Food and Agricultural Sciences and a Division of the Public Services Department of Collier County government. Call 239-252-4800. Extension programs are open to all persons without regard to race, color, creed, sex, handicap or national origin. For updates on the Southwest Florida Horticulture Learning Center and more landscape pest management details, visit <http://collier.ifas.ufl.edu>.

