

ABRUS PRECATORIUS L.

Fabaceae (Leguminosae)/Pea Family

Common Names: Rosary pea, crab's eyes, precatory pea, licorice vine

Synonymy: *Abrus abrus* (L.) W. F. Wight

Origin: India, and perhaps other parts of tropical Asia

Botanical Description: High-climbing, twining, or trailing woody vine with slender herbaceous branches. Leaves alternate, petioled, 5-13 cm (2-5 in) long, even-pinnately compound with 5-15 pairs of leaflets, these oval to oblong, to 1.8 cm (< 1 in) long, with margins entire. Flowers shaped like pea flowers, white to pink or reddish, small, in short-stalked dense clusters at leaf axils. Fruit a short, oblong pod, splitting before falling to reveal 3-8 shiny hard seeds, 6-7 mm (< 1 in) long, scarlet with black bases.

Ecological Significance: Introduced to Florida for ornament before 1932 (Morton 1976). Noted as abundantly naturalized by Small (1933), Lakela and Craighead (1965), Long and Lakela (1971), Morton (1976), Austin (1978), Wunderlin (1982), and Isely (1990). Described by an early Florida horticulturist as quickly “taking full possession” of a young forest and impossible to remove after several years’ effort (Morton 1976). Has invaded undisturbed pinelands and hammocks, including the globally imperiled pine rocklands of Dade County (M. McMahon, Biological and Environmental Consulting, personal observation). Classified as an invasive weed in India, the Caribbean Islands, Belize, west Polynesia, and Hawaii (Holm *et al.* 1979, Wester 1992). Widely introduced and “has run wild in most warm climates” (Morton 1971b). Seeds used as beads in many countries (Isely 1990). Seeds extremely poisonous for humans, cattle, and horses—one ingested seed may prove fatal (Morton 1971b, Isely 1990).

Distribution: Now pantropical (Isely 1990). Common across central and south Florida; herbarium specimens of naturalized populations collected from 27 counties, from Hernando, Marion, Lake, and Volusia counties south to the Keys (Wunderlin *et al.* 1995). Reported from over 40 natural areas in Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, Indian River, Highlands, Collier, Lee, Sarasota, Manatee, Hillsborough, and Lake counties (EPPC 1996).

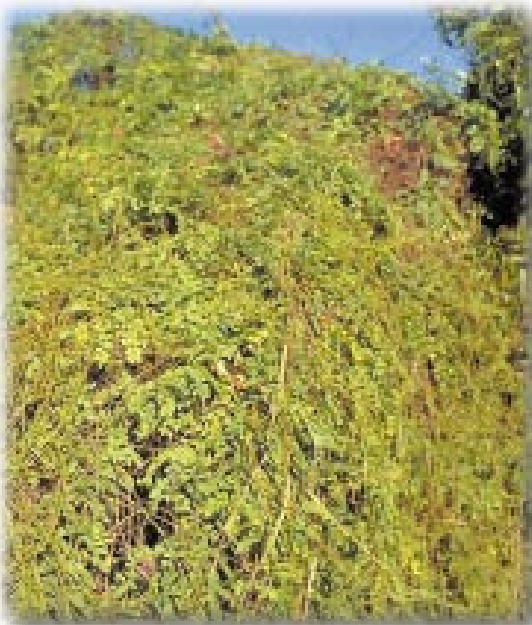
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Compound leaves

Life History: Roots deeply and tenaciously, difficult to eradicate (R. Moyroud, Mesozoic Landscapes, 1995 personal communication). Increases in population size following fire (Maithani *et al.* 1986). Flowers in summer, fruiting prolifically. Seeds dispersed by birds (Austin 1998). Has been investigated for various types of usable extracts, such as for insecticides (e.g., Khanna *et al.* 1989), antifertility drugs (e.g., Sinha 1990), other medicines (e.g., Wambebe and Amosun 1984), and sweetening agents (Jakimovich *et al.* 1990).

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**Covering native scrub plants,
Palm Beach County**

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Seeds

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Immature pods