



## Castor Oil Seeds

Castor oil seeds may be used in a variety of ways in school science courses. Because castor oil is relatively harmless, its seeds are wrongly assumed to be so also. In fact, the seeds contain a powerful toxic protein, ricin, a minute amount of which could prove fatal.

In a recent incident a child became seriously ill as a result of eating a castor oil seed. Members therefore are advised to examine their courses and consider whether it is necessary to continue using these seeds and, if so, what steps could be taken to prevent children from eating them. For example in the Insight to Science scheme they are used to give practice in the use of keys: in this case there is no need for the children to handle the seeds, which could be sealed in a transparent container, or embedded in a resin.