



### Poison devil's-pepper (*Rauvolfia vomitoria*)

- Scientific name & Code:** *Rauvolfia vomitoria* Afzelius., **RAVO**  
Synonyms - none
- Family:** Apocynaceae – Dogbane Family
- Duration/Growth Habit:** Perennial Shrub/Tree
- Common names:** English – poison devil's-pepper, swizzle stick
- Origin:** Africa
- Description:** Shrub or tree 0.5-20 (40) m high, bark smooth, striate or fissured grey-brown or dark brown. Branchlets in whorls of 3-5, pale to greenish brown. Leaves in whorls of 3-5, blade elliptic 3.5-27 cm long, 2-9 cm wide, glabrous. Inflorescence in whorls of 1-4, dense, 15-450 flowered. Flowers fragrant, sepals ovate, 1-2.2 mm long, 0.9-2.1 mm wide, corolla greenish white to yellow, tube 5.8-12 mm long, hairy inside with 3 small belts. Fruits bright orange or red, globose, ovoid, or ellipsoid 8-14 mm long, up to 9 mm in diameter. Seeds ellipsoid 6-8 mm long.
- Propagation:** Abundant seed producer. Seed dispersal by fruit eating birds.
- Distribution:** Identified in Hawaii (Hawai'i, O'ahu).
- Habitat/Ecology:** Extremely fast growing tree (1-1.5 foot diameter in 5 years). Occurs in gallery forests but is mostly found in forest regrowth where fallow periods are prolonged. Extremely shade tolerant. Tolerates, or benefits from mutilation, cultivation, or fire. Grows from sea level to 5500 feet elevation.
- Environmental impact:** Forms dense thickets rapidly, invading roadsides, forests, gulches, and pastures. Can form an essentially closed canopy in a few years. Plant parts contain medicinal alkaloids that may be poisonous.
- Management:** Physical – Reduction of fallow periods to 2-4 years will reduce number of individuals. Cutting is ineffective. Trees respond vigorously after cutting; new stems arise from stumps.  
Chemical – Broadcast application/spraying on juvenile plants, frill and squirt on more mature trees using glyphosate or imazapyr (both are non-selective herbicides, glyphosate may be more effective).  
Biological – The potential for biological control has not been evaluated.

**PIER Risk Assessment: High Risk, score: 21**

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