



Henna or Egyptian privet

Taxonomy

Order: Myrtales

Family: Lythraceae

Species: *Lawsonia inermis* L.

Summary

A flowering plant, probably native to Asia. It has been introduced to many tropical and subtropical parts of the world and is cultivated as an ornamental, hedge plant and for the commercial production of the dye henna (used to dye skin, hair, fingernails and fabrics). In some areas it has naturalized and is an invasive environmental weed, threatening native biodiversity.



Henna flowers © A.R. Pittaway

Biology

It is a perennial, self-pollinating shrub that produces flowers all year round. It requires high temperatures (~25°C) for germination, growth and establishment. It grows best in areas where mean annual temperatures are within the range 19-27°C and mean annual rainfall ranging from 500 mm to 1500 mm. It can grow on poor, stony, and sandy soils, but it is also adapted to heavy, fertile clay soils. It tolerates drought and semiarid conditions and often grows in temporarily flooded, riverbeds and riverine thickets.

Distribution in Caribbean

It is widespread in the Caribbean.

Pathway of Entry

Natural dispersal: birds feed on the fruit.

Intentional introduction: it was widely introduced to be used as an ornamental, hedge plant and for the commercial production of henna dye.

Impact

Henna is highly adaptable to different environments. It can form dense thickets which cause environmental degradation by out-competing and replacing native vegetation, particularly on alluvial soils and in riparian zones. Henna plants also impoverish the soil as they remove large quantities of nutrients. It has the potential to be a serious environmental weed and a threat to native biodiversity.



Further Information:

<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/29956>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawsonia_inermis

<https://www.gbif.org/species/5420912>



Lawsonia inermis flowers © Samira Akil Zaman



Lawsonia inermis plant © pureorganichenna



Lawsonia inermis leaves © www.keralathanima.in

Field Description

Henna is a much-branched, hairless (glabrous) shrub or small tree, 2-6 m tall, with greyish-brown bark, unarmed when young, older plants with spine-tipped branchlets. Young branches are quadrangular.

Leaves are opposite, entire and sub-sessile, elliptic to broadly lanceolate, 1.5-5 cm x 0.5-2 cm.

Flowers are numerous in large, pyramidal, terminal cymes, fragrant, 1 cm across and 4-merous, calyx with 2 mm long tube, and 3 mm long spreading lobes; petals orbicular or obovate, white or red; stamens 8, inserted in pairs on the rim of the calyx tube; ovary 4-celled, style up to 5 mm long, erect.

Fruit is a globose capsule, 4-8 mm in diameter, many-seeded, opening irregularly. Seeds 3 mm long, angular, with thick coat.

Similar Species

There are 15 genera in the family Lythraceae native to the Neotropical region of which *Cuphea* is the largest with about 240 spp. However, there are unlikely to be any other species assigned to the genus *Lawsonia* encountered in TCI.