

Cerbera manghas L.

Family:

Apocynaceae

Linnaeus, C. von (1753) *Species Plantarum* 2: 208. Type: Habitat in Indiis ad aquas.

Common name:

Beach Milkwood; Dog Bane; Dog Bone; Grey Milkwood; Milkwood, Grey; Milkwood; Pink Eyed Cerbera; Rubber Tree

Stem

Exudate copious, usually milky but often slightly green or yellowish.

Leaves

Petioles and twigs produce a milky exudate. Leaf blade rather large, about 13-25 x 4-7 cm, petioles about 1.5-6 cm long. Lateral veins about 25-35 on each side of the midrib. Stipules small and inconspicuous, wedged between the petiole and the twig.

Flowers

Flowers strongly perfumed, about 20-35 mm diam., centre red. Sepals about 12-25 mm long. Corolla tube about 22-35 mm long, lobes about 18-26 mm long.

Fruit

Fresh fruits produce a milky exudate when cut. Fruits about 6-7 x 3.5-4 cm. Endocarp thick, woody and fibrous.

Seedlings

Four to six cataphylls normally produced before the first true leaves. First leaf blades narrowly lanceolate to elliptic, apex drawn out into a fine point, base attenuate. Intramarginal vein present. At the tenth leaf stage: leaf blade about 17.5 x 3.2 cm, petiole about 1 cm long, lateral vein angle almost 90 and the veins forming loops near the blade margin. All seedling parts produce a milky exudate when cut or broken. Taproot slightly swollen. A large seed about 8 x 4 cm remains attached to the seedling. Seed germination time 55 days.

Distribution and Ecology

A widespread species in NT, CYP, NEQ, CEQ, and southwards as far as south-eastern Queensland. Altitudinal range from sea level to 80 m. Grows in lowland rain forest and similar situations close to the sea. Also occurs in Malesia.

Natural History & Notes

Cases of poisoning resulting in death have been reported after consuming the seeds of this species. Everist (1974).

A potent drug cerberin has been extracted from the extremely poisonous seeds; it has some resemblance to digitalis in its effect on the heart, and has been used in medicine in very small amounts. Other parts of the plant are less toxic. Cribb (1981).

Synonyms

Tanghinia manghas (L.) G. Don., *Gen. Hist.* 4: 98(1837). **Cerbera odollum** Gaert., *Queensland Flora* 3: 981(1900). **Cerbera odollum** auct. non Gaertn., *Fl. Austral.* 4: 306(1869). **Cerbera odollam** var. **mugfordii** F.M. Bailey, *Queensland Agricultural Journal* 3(4): 282(1898), Type: Mourilyan Harbour, near high-water mark, Wm. Mugford. **Cerbera lactaria** Buch.-Ham. ex Spreng., *Sys. Veg.* 1: 642(1824), Type: Not designated. **Cerbera lactaria** Ham. ex D. Dietr., *Synopsis Plantarum* 1: 623(1805), Type: In Ind. Orient.

RFK Code

379



Flower. © Stanley Breeden



Fruit, side view, seed. © W. T. Cooper



10th leaf stage, cotyledons still attached. © CSIRO



Scale bar 10mm. © CSIRO



Leaves and Flowers. © CSIRO



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