

Asclepias curassavica

[Synonyms : *Asclepias bicolor*, *Asclepias curassavica* var. *concolor*, *Asclepias nivea* var. *curassavica*]

BASTARD IPECACUANHA is an annual to perennial subshrub. Native to Middle America (particularly Mexico) and the West Indies, it has small bright orange-red flowers.

It is also known as *Algodoncillo* (Spanish), Bastard ipecac, Blood flower, Bloodflower milkweed, Blood-weed, *Bunga mas* (Malay), Butterfly weed, *Corcalito* (Spanish), Curassavican swallow-wort, False ipecac, False ipecacuanha, *Flor de sangre* (Spanish), Garden silkweed, *Herbe-papillon* (French), Indian root, Ipecacuanha, *Ipéca sauvage* (French), *Kakatundi* (Bengali, Hindi), *Kapas cindè* (Indonesian), Kittie McWanie (West Indian), *Klejicha kurasavská* (Czech), *Matac* (West Indian), Milkweed, Native cotton bush, *Petit ipéca* (French), *Punasilkkiyrtti* (Finnish), Redhead, Red-top, *Rödsidenört* (Swedish), Scarlet milkweed, *Seidenpflanze* (German), Silkweed, Swallow-wort, *Tien deng* (Thai), Tropical milkweed, Wild cotton, Wild ipecac, Wild ipecacuanha, Vegetable silk, *Yuquillo* (Spanish), and *Zèb-man-boivin* (Creole).

Fibre can be extracted from the stems.

Warning – the whole plant is poisonous in large doses and can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, salivation, muscle paralysis, cramps and death. The milky latex can irritate the skin. Grazing livestock have been killed by eating it but it is usually avoided by them.

Curassavica means ‘of or from Curacao or the Dutch Antilles and the Caribbean Sea’.

Although in the past the roots of the plant have been offered as an alternative to or adulterant of ipecacuanha (*Psychotria ipecacuanha*), bastard ipecacuanha’s family is a completely different one to that of ipecacuanha (*Psychotria ipecacuanha* of *Rubiaceae*) and it has different properties.

The roots have been used to poison fish.

In the Caribbean brooms made from the stem fibre were used to clear rooms of fleas. In this connection it is interesting to note confirmation in the British botanical garden’s eponymous *Kew Bulletin* of 1897 in which it is understood to have stated that the plant has insecticidal properties that are particularly abhorrent for fleas.

The seed hairs of bastard ipecacuanha have been used for pillow stuffing.

Authorities believe that bastard ipecacuanha was introduced to Hawaii in the mid-1800s.

It is attractive to monarch butterflies, and in Australia the Brown wander butterfly (*Lanaus plexus*).

Medicinally, despite its poisonous nature the roots have been used in the Caribbean to treat dysentery, and in Malaysia a poultice of the bruised flowers has been applied to ease headaches. In Africa the flower’s juice has been used to stem bleeding, and the plant has also been used there to ease fever and to treat piles, some venereal disease, ringworm and children’s intestinal disorders.