

Euphorbia hirta

[Synonyms : *Chamaesyce hirta*, *Euphorbia capitata*, *Euphorbia hirta* var. *typica*, *Euphorbia pilulifera*]

EUPHORBIA is an annual. Native to tropical India it has minute, reddish-green or mauvish-white flowers.

It is also known as *Abulebben* (Arabic), *Amampatchaiarisi* (Tamil), *Ara tanah* (Malay), *Asthma plant*, *Asthma weed*, *Australian asthma herb*, *Baro-kheruie* (Bengali), *Bu-dada-kiriya* (Singhalese), *Catshair*, *Cỏ sĩa* (Vietnamese), *Dada-kiriya* (Singhalese), *Dudheli* (Gujarati), *Dudhi* (Hindi), *Gatas-gátas* (Filipino/Tagalog), *Gelang susu* (Javanese), *Kiri-tala* (Singhalese), *Mal nommée vrai* (West Indian), *Milk-weed*, *Moti dudhi* (Marathi), *Nam nom racha si* (Thai), *Nanabala* (Telugu), *Nanangkaan* (Sundanese), *Nela-palai* (Malayalam), *Palavi* (Tamil), *Pill-bearing spurge*, *Pusitoo* (Sanskrit), *Queensland asthma plant*, *Queensland asthma weed*, *Red euphorbia*, *Rooi Euphorbia* (Afrikaans), and *Z'herbe mal nommée* (West Indian).

Warning – large doses aggravate the stomach and the intestines, and can cause nausea and vomiting. The milky juice can cause skin irritation. (However euphorbia is one of the few species in the genus still considered to be relatively safe.)

Hirta is Latin (shaggy, hairy, rough, prickly) meaning ‘hairy’.

In India the young shoots, eaten in small quantities, have been viewed as a famine food.

African children have used the milky latex to make a temporary tattoo on their skin. Patterns made with it were then rubbed with charcoal and the resulting black markings were easily removed by washing.

Medicinally, this species can be an ingredient in herbal preparations for the treatment of asthma, hay fever and bronchitis (for which an infusion of the leaves was used in the West Indies). In western Africa and in some parts of Asia local treatments have included the use of the latex not only for some eye ailments but also as a remedy for nursing mothers for increasing milk flow. The leaves have been used in easing sores. In India the plant juice has been turned to as a treatment for dysentery, constipation and wind, and a decoction has been given for asthma and respiratory ailments.