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Asystasia gangetica (L.) T. Anderson subsp. *gangetica*

ACANTHUS FAMILY

Acanthaceae

COMMON NAMES

English: Chinese violet, coromandel, creeping foxglove, Ganges primrose, Philippine violet

DESCRIPTION

A long-lived, herbaceous, mat-forming creeper growing less than 0.5 m tall with the ability to sprawl or clamber over supporting vegetation to a height of 3 m or more; stems are lightly hairy, rooting at nodes when they come into contact with moist soil.

Leaves: Bright green leaves above and paler green below, egg- or heart-shaped or oval (2.5–8 cm long and 1.5–4 cm wide), sparsely hairy, margins entire or slightly bluntly toothed, apex or terminal ends with pointed tips, arranged in opposite pairs along stem; leaf stalks variable (8–20 mm long).

Flowers: Pink, mauve or purplish in colour with paler throats, or flowers that are entirely white or cream with pale yellowish throats, tubular (1.8–3.5 cm long and ~ 3 cm across) in elongated clusters (10 cm long); flower stalks short (2–3 mm long); *A. gangetica* (L.)

T. Anderson subsp. *micrantha* (Nees) Ensermu flowers are mostly white, but the bottom petal lobe has purple blotches arranged in two parallel lines.

Fruits: Capsules (dry fruits that open at maturity), green turning brown as they mature, elongated or club-shaped (13–36 mm long) containing four seeds; seeds flattened (about 5 mm long and 1 mm wide), bone-coloured to brownish-black.

ORIGIN

India and Sri Lanka.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornament.

INVADES

Disturbed sites, roadsides, waste areas, urban open space, coastal habitats, open woodlands, and forest margins.

IMPACTS

Creeping foxglove has the ability to form dense stands across large areas, smothering native plants to the detriment of biodiversity. In South-east Asia *A. gangetica* subsp. *gangetica* is a major weed of rubber, oil palm and coffee plantations, and other crops. Also present in northern Australia where it has the potential to impact negatively on summer and plantation crops since it effectively competes for soil nutrients (Environmental Weeds of Australia, 2020). Naturalized in the coastal districts of northern and central Queensland, and the northern parts of Western Australia. Also naturalized on Christmas Island and possibly naturalised in the northern parts of the Northern Territory (Environmental Weeds of Australia, 2020).

NOTES

Introduced as an ornamental plant to Martinique, Guadalupe, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Barbados as early as 1898 (CABI, 2020). Reported in Puerto Rico for the first time in 1982 as “cultivated and escaped in moist districts” and for the Virgin Islands in 1996 “in gardens or escaped in disturbed areas” (Acevedo-Rodríguez, 1996). In Puerto Rico, this species is known from the northern half of the island where it is considered as “quite common” (Acevedo-Rodríguez, 2005). It is naturalized on beaches in St. Martin, along roadsides in Saba and in hedges bordering vegetable gardens in St. Eustatius (Van der Burg *et al.*, 2012). Present on St Vincent and the Grenadines; naturalized in Antigua and Barbuda; and invasive in Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Lucia (A. Witt, *pers. obs.*).



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