



# HONG KONG CHARACTERISTIC MEDICINAL PLANTS

香港特色藥用植物



衛生署  
Department of Health

# **HONG KONG CHARACTERISTIC MEDICINAL PLANTS**



**Department of Health  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China**

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# Preface

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The National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (NATCM) has organized and carried out the Fourth National Survey of Chinese Materia Medica (CMM) Resources since 2011. The Department of Health (DH) was invited by the NATCM in 2022 to conduct the survey of CMM resources in Hong Kong. Through public tender, the School of Chinese Medicine (SCM) of the Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) was awarded to compile the Preliminary List of Hong Kong CMM Resources (the List). SCM has compiled the List from literature review, results of the questionnaires, consultation and field investigation. The List covers 1,256 (being confirmed by NATCM in August 2024) species of medicinal plants, including the species being recorded in the National or Provincial CMM standards, those with medicinal demand or records in the folks of Hong Kong as well as sufficiently abundant in Hong Kong. On the recommendation of expert scholars and representatives from the Chinese medicine sector, 50 species of medicinal plants with distinctive Hong Kong characteristics were selected from the List for the publication of *Hong Kong Characteristic Medicinal Plants*.

Situated in the subtropical region with a South Asian tropical monsoon climate, Hong Kong has a wide diversity of abundant plant species including around 3,300 species of vascular plants and about 2,100 of which are native species. To promote public understanding of and interest in medicinal plants with distinctive Hong Kong characteristics, these plants are showcased in this book with illustrations and details such as their names, plant taxonomic families, scientific (Latin) names, photos, habitats, distribution, flowering and fruiting periods, identifying features, as well as the names, photos and medicinal information of herbal medicines made from them, along with their applications and characteristics.

The compilation of the List marked the first phase of the survey of CMM resources in Hong Kong. The DH would like to express its gratitude to the SCM for undertaking the task, and to the expert scholars and representatives from the Chinese medicine sector for their input, which has facilitated the smooth completion of the task. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department is also thanked for its botanical expertise and support. In view of the subsequent tasks regarding the survey of CMM resources in Hong Kong, which include research into the local market of Chinese herbal medicines, survey on traditional knowledge of folk medicines and field studies of medicinal plant resources in Hong Kong, continuous support from all parties is much appreciated.

# The Essential User's Guide

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*Hong Kong Characteristic Medicinal Plants* gives a comprehensive picture of medicinal plants with distinctive features in Hong Kong to inspire public interest in and deepen their understanding of Chinese medicine in the local context. This handbook features a collection of 50 indigenous species of medicinal plants selected based on the following criteria:

- (1) being first discovered by Hong Kong;
- (2) having the Chinese or scientific (Latin) name with Hong Kong or place names of Hong Kong;
- (3) having customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong;
- (4) relating to an indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong;
- (5) distributing in unique habitats of Hong Kong;
- (6) possessing distinctive regional features;
- (7) being source species of crude herbal medicines commonly used or commercial herbal medicines commonly traded in Hong Kong; and
- (8) being ingredients of soups or herbal teas widely used by people in Hong Kong.

The essential user's guide briefs readers on how to use this handbook, which is intended for reference only. Members of the public should refrain from unauthorised picking of wild plants and reckless usage without the guidance of registered Chinese medicine practitioners to avoid breaching of the law and posing health risks such as accidental poisoning. The contents of this handbook were completed by the DH in collaboration with the SCM of HKBU.

## *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Jacq.) A. DC.

*Platycodonis Radix* (Campanulaceae)

桔梗 桔梗 (桔梗科)

1

Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Jacq.) A. DC.
- Herb
- Campanulate corolla in bluish-purple
- Leaves are whorled, partly whorled or all alternately arranged



### Habitats

On sunny grass slopes



### Distribution

Hong Kong Island,  
Castle Peak and  
Long Ke

2



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
July to September

33



3

◀ Flower buds resemble filled hot air balloons

### Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter-pungent in taste, and neutral in nature. They are able to diffuse the lung, soothe the throat, dispel phlegm, and expel pus (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

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### Application and Features

- This is a rare and precious plant in Hong Kong.
- This plant is widely cultivated in northern China, but it is sparse in Hong Kong where it is mainly found in the tussock on hills. Hong Kong is the southernmost natural habitat of this plant.
- The roots of this plant are sturdy and straight. Hence it is named “桔梗” in Chinese for such feature (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- *Platycodonis Radix* is hailed as “a vehicular herb” as it can direct the effects of other herbs to apply specifically in the upper body (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- Together with *Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma*, this plant can treat lung abscess (*Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber*).
- Together with *Aurantii Fructus*, this plant can relieve painless fullness in the chest (*Dictionary of Chinese Materia Medica*).
- Koreans consider *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Jacq.) A. DC. a vegetable and use its fresh roots to make kimchi (*Dictionary of Chinese Cooking*).

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Herbal medicine:  
*Platycodonis Radix*

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- 1 The name of the medicinal plant, its name of herbal medicine, the plant taxonomic family to which it belongs and its scientific (Latin) name and characteristics
- 2 Photographs of the medicinal plant, its habitats, distribution, flowering and fruiting periods within Hong Kong
- 3 The identifying features of the medicinal plant
- 4 Information on the plant's medicinal use, including the nature, taste and functions of its medicinal parts
- 5 Image of the medicinal plant in form of herbal medicine, its application as well as features

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# *Illicium dunnianum* Tutcher

Illicii Radix (Illiciaceae)

紅花八角 樟木鑽 (八角科)

► First discovered by Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Illicium dunnianum* Tutcher
- Streamside shrub
- Dense leaves grow near the apex of its branches



## Habitats

Along riverbanks  
or ravines



## Distribution

Wu Kau Tang,  
Bride's Pool,  
Nam Chung and  
Luk Keng



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to July;  
October to November  
Fruiting:  
July to October



▲ Its flowers, with slender pedicels, grow either solitarily at leaf axils or in clusters of two or three at leaf axils near the apex of its branches



▲ Its aggregate fruit has 7 to 8 star-shaped follicles with distinct diamond-shaped tips

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots or bark, bitter and pungent in taste, and warm in nature. They are used to dissipate stasis, disperse swelling, dispel wind and relieve pain (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- The plant was first discovered by S. T. Dunn, the then Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department, along a stream in the northeastern New Territories in 1903. Hence, the specific epithet “*dunnianum*” in its scientific (Latin) name is named after him.
- This toxic plant is for external use only. It can be triturated into powder or mixed into a medicinal liquor for application onto the skin to treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, and rheumatic arthralgia (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).
- Although its follicle looks similar to Star Anise, the spice used for marinating food, it should not be orally consumed as it contains a higher content of the toxic substance Anisatin (*Interesting Chinese Herbs I*).



▲ Herbal medicine:  
Illicii Radix

# *Pavetta hongkongensis* Bremek.

Pavettae Herba (Rubiaceae)

香港大沙葉 大沙葉 (茜草科)

▶ Named with Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Pavetta hongkongensis* Bremek.

- Shrub
- Its leaves are covered with nitrogen-fixing bacteria, giving it a starry appearance and a grainy, sand-like texture. Hence, it is named “大沙葉” in Chinese, meaning “big sandy leaf” (upper left)
- Its flowers are white and its inflorescence develops on the apex of its lateral branches



## Habitats

In thickets and forests



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to October  
Fruiting:  
June to December



▲ It has linear protruding styles



▲ Its drupe is spherical in shape with a persistent calyx limb on its apex

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Bitter and pungent in taste and cold in nature, the whole plant or its stems and leaves can be of medicinal use to clear heat, remove toxins, activate blood and eliminate stasis (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- The plant was first discovered by an American named C. Wright on Hong Kong Island in 1850. Hence, the specific epithet “*hongkongensis*” in its scientific (Latin) name means “Hong Kong”.
- This species, documented in “*Medicinal Characteristics of Raw Herbs*” and “*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*”, is used to treat skin diseases.
- Feeding cattle with the stems and leaves of the plant can cure their rash (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Pavettae Herba

# *Rhaphidophora hongkongensis* Schott

Rhaphidophorae Herba (Araceae)

獅子尾 青竹標 (天南星科)

▶ Named with Hong Kong



## Habitats

On the trunk of trees  
in tropical ravines,  
forests or on  
rocky cliffs



## Distribution

Hong Kong Island,  
Tai Mo Shan,  
Ng Tung Chai,  
Ma On Shan,  
Bride's Pool,  
Castle Peak and  
Lantau Island



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
April to August

- ▲ Plant: *Rhaphidophora hongkongensis* Schott
- Epiphytic liana. It crawls on the ground surface, rocks or climbs trees



▲ The leaves on its growing branches, adaxially grooved, are usually falcate-elliptic, with leaf sheaths on the lateral sides reaching to its articulation



▲ Its spathe ranges from green to pale yellow, while its spadix has no pedicel and is cylindrical in shape

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Pungent in taste and cool in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to dissipate stasis, relieve pain, clear heat, suppress cough, cool the blood and remove toxins (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- The plant was first discovered in Hong Kong in 1857. Hence, the specific epithet “*hongkongensis*” in its scientific (Latin) name means “Hong Kong”.
- The plant is mildly toxic, and large dosage is not recommended. An appropriate amount can be smashed and applied externally to treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, and rheumatic arthralgia (*Materia Medica of China*).
- For external application to treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, fractures and burns (*Flora of China*).



▲ Herbal medicine:  
Rhaphidophorae Herba

***Acanthopanax trifoliatum* (L.) Merr.** [Syn. *Eleutherococcus trifoliatum* (L.) S. Y. Hu]  
Acanthopanax Radix Seu Cortex (Araliaceae)

白筋 三加皮 (五加科)

▶ Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Acanthopanax trifoliatum* (L.) Merr.
- Climbing shrub or vine. The whole plant is covered in hook-like thorns
- Ternately compound leaf



#### Habitats

In villages,  
on hillside tracks,  
on forest edges  
and in thickets



#### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



#### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
August to September  
Fruiting:  
September to December



▲ Umbels grown on the leaf axils



▲ Flatly spherical drupes with bifid persistent styles at the apex

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots or root bark, bitter and astringent in taste, and mildly cold in nature. They are used to dispel wind, remove dampness, clear heat, remove toxins, dissipate stasis and relieve pain (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- Hong Kong botanist Professor Hu Shiu-ying named this plant as *Eleutherococcus trifolius* (L.) S.Y. Hu.
- Use with caution during pregnancy. For treatment of ulcers, scabies and eczema, this herb can be taken orally as a decoction while its fresh roots and leaves can be smashed for external application or decocted for washing. Double boiling pork bones with this herb, *Pterospermi Heterophylli Radix*, *Kadsurae Coccineae Radix et Caulis*, *Kadsurae Heteroclitaе Caulis* and *Sargentodoxae Caulis* can treat rheumatic arthralgia (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).
- This herb is one of the ingredients for the 24 Herbs Tea (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines (Revised Edition)*).
- The leafy twigs of this plant can be consumed as food and are known as “筋菜”, meaning “prickly vegetables” (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).



▲ Herbal medicine:  
*Acanthopanax Radix* Seu Cortex

# *Aquilaria sinensis* (Lour.) Spreng.

Aquilariae Lignum Resinatum (Thymelaeaceae)

白木香 沉香 (瑞香科)

▶ Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Aquilaria sinensis* (Lour.) Spreng., also known as “土沉香” in Chinese
- Evergreen tree with smooth dark grey bark
- Veins are subparallel, slender, obscure



## Habitats

On hilly grounds and slopes, and in thin forests by the sunny road-sides



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to May

Fruiting:  
September to October



▲ Yellow-greenish flowers; shallowly campanulate calyx tubes covered in pubescence



▲ Capsules split into two valves upon maturation. A thread will grow out of the base and hang seeds in mid-air

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are the wood containing resin, pungent and bitter in taste and mildly warm in nature. It can be used to move *qi*, relieve pain, warm the middle to stop vomiting, absorb *qi* and relieve wheezing (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This rare and precious plant in Hong Kong comes under the protection of the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586).
- It is documented in *Chronicles of Guangdong Province* written in the Ming dynasty that fragrant wood from the southern Guangdong (including agarwood and sandalwood) were once transshipped and distributed at Shek Pai Wan in Aberdeen, which is how Hong Kong (which means “Fragrant Harbour”) got its name (*Hong Kong Naturography*).
- After the heart of the tree becomes infected with fungi due to injury, a large amount of fragrant resin will be secreted at the injured site to prevent the infection from spreading. The resin-impregnated wood has a higher density than water, which causes it to sink, earning it the Chinese name of “沉香” which means “sunk fragrance”. Such wood gives out an elegant scent when burnt, making it an aromatic material in incense sticks.



▲ Herbal medicine:  
Aquilariae Lignum Resinatum

## *Datura metel* L.

Daturae Flos (Solanaceae)

白花曼陀羅 洋金花 (茄科)

▶ Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Datura metel* L.

- Woody herb
- Broad ovate leaves with long petioles and asymmetrical wedge-like base



### Habitats

On sunny hillside  
grasslands or beside  
residences



### Distribution

Shek O, Ng Tung Chai,  
Tai Long Sai Wan,  
Ap Lei Chau and  
Ping Chau



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to December  
Fruiting:  
March to December



▲ Solitary flowers stand erect with funnel-form white corolla



▲ Subglobose capsules with sparse short, thick prickles

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its flowers, pungent in taste and warm in nature. They are used to relieve wheezing, suppress cough, arrest convulsions and relieve pain (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- Being one of the four most toxic plants in Hong Kong, its toxic constituents are solanaceous tropane alkaloids, such as atropine, scopolamine and hyoscyamine (*Atlas of Poisonous Plants in Hong Kong*).
- This herb is highly toxic and should be used with caution. Poisoning from this herb has been reported in Hong Kong, where symptoms include tachycardia and shortness of breath, mydriasis and blurred vision. Respiratory paralysis may cause death in severe cases (*Common Toxic Plants in Hong Kong*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Daturae Flos*

# *Gelsemium elegans* (Gardn. et Champ.) Benth.

*Gelsemium Radix et Rhizoma* (Loganiaceae)

鈎吻 斷腸草 (馬錢科)

► Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Gelsemium elegans* (Gardn. et Champ.) Benth.

- Evergreen shrub
- Its leaves are oppositely arranged and in ovate-lanceolate shape



## Habitats

In thickets on mountains and by roadsides, or at the bottom of thin forests on moist and fertile hills and mountain slopes



## Distribution

Ma On Shan,  
Tai Po Kau,  
Lam Tsuen,  
Ng Tung Chai,  
Ho Pui and Sai Kung



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
June to December  
Fruiting:  
December to March  
of the following year



- ▲ The inflorescence is a terminal thyrsum. It has funnellform yellow corollas with light red spots on the inside



- ▲ The capsules have 2 shallow longitudinal grooves before dehiscence

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots and stems, bitter and pungent in taste, and warm in nature. They are used to disperse swelling, draw out toxins, dispel wind, relieve pain, kill worms and relieve itching (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- Being one of the four most toxic plants in Hong Kong, the plant is toxic in its entirety. Its toxic constituents are alkaloids of *Gelsemium* such as gelsemine, gelsenicine and humantenirine (*Atlas of Poisonous Plants in Hong Kong*).
- This herb is highly toxic, and should be used for external application only. Poisoning from this herb has been reported in Hong Kong. Symptoms of poisoning include dizziness, dysphagia, diplopia, mydriasis, nausea, vomiting, or even death due to respiratory paralysis in more serious cases (*Common Toxic Plants in Hong Kong*).
- It is often used as a veterinary drug for repelling worms in pigs, cattle and sheep (*Flora of China*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Gelsemii Radix et Rhizoma*

***Microcos paniculata* L.** [Syn. *Microcos nervosa* (Lour.) S. Y. Hu]  
Microctis Folium (Tiliaceae)

破布葉 布渣葉 (椴樹科)

▶ Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Microcos paniculata* L.
- Small tree
- Its thin and leathery leaves have 3 veins that extend from the base. Its stipules, petioles and the veins on both sides of its leaves are densely covered with stellate light yellow hairs



**Habitats**

In thickets on  
mountain slopes



**Distribution**

Across Hong Kong



**Flowering and  
Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:

June to July

Fruiting:

July to December



- ▲ The inflorescence is a panicle. Its bracts, peduncles, rachises and pedicels are all densely covered with stellate pubescence in light yellow colour. Its flowers have 5 yellow petals



- ▲ The shape of its drupes, which are brown in colour when mature, is obovoid

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its leaves, mildly sour in taste and cool in nature. They are used to promote digestion, resolve stagnation, clear heat and drain dampness (*Pharmacopoeia of the Peoples Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- Hong Kong botanist Professor Hu Shiu-ying named this plant as *Microcos nervosa* (Lour.) S.Y. Hu.
- This herb is one of the ingredients for the 24 Herbs Tea. It can be taken as a decoction for treating cold, indigestion, abdominal distention with food retention, etc. (*Materia Medica of China*).
- Its wood can be used to make cabinets and the fibres from its bark can be used to make ropes.



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Microctis Foliolum*

# *Strophanthus divaricatus* (Lour.) Hook. et Arn.

Strophanthi Divaricati Semen (Apocynaceae)

**羊角拗** 羊角拗子 (夾竹桃科)

► Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Strophanthus divaricatus* (Lour.) Hook. et Arn.

- Liana
- Its trailing branches in deep grey colour are densely covered with circular greyish white lenticels (upper right)



## Habitats

In thin forests by roadsides or in thickets on mountain slopes



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to May  
Fruiting:  
June to October



- ▲ Its sepals are in narrow triangular shape, and there are red spots at the base inside its long, cylindrical, and yellow corollas



- ▲ The shape of its divergent follicles resembles a pair of goat horns and hence it is named “羊角拗” in Chinese, meaning “goat horns”

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its seeds, bitter in taste and cold in nature. They are used to dispel wind, unblock the collaterals, remove toxins and kill worms (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- Being one of the four most toxic plants in Hong Kong, this plant is toxic in its entirety, especially its seeds. The toxic constituents are cardiac glycosides such as divaricoside and strophanthins (*Atlas of Poisonous Plants in Hong Kong*).
- This herb is highly toxic, and should be used for external application only. Poisoning from this plant has been reported in Hong Kong. Symptoms of poisoning include vomiting, abdominal pain, arrhythmia, mydriasis, followed by convulsion, coma, and death due to cardiac arrest (*Common Toxic Plants in Hong Kong*).
- Its roots and cauline leaves can be used to drain wind-dampness, unblock the meridian and collateral vessels, remove toxins and heal furuncles, kill worms, relieve itching and pain (*Atlas of Poisonous Plants in Hong Kong*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine:  
Strophanthi Divaricati Semen

# *Strychnos angustiflora* Benth.

Strychni Angustiflorae Semen (Loganiaceae)

牛眼馬錢 牛眼珠 (馬錢科)

▶ Indissoluble bonding with Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Strychnos angustiflora* Benth.

- Liana
- Hairless branches. Spiral-shaped tendrils on branchlets grow opposite of leaves (upper left)
- Leaf blades are leathery and ovate-shaped, with 3 to 5 basal veins



## Habitats

In thin forests of hilly landscapes or in thickets



## Distribution

Hong Kong Island, Shatin, Ma On Shan, Sam A Tsuen, Tai Wan, Lantau Island, Lamma Island, Beaufort Island and Green Island



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
April to June  
Fruiting:  
June to December



▲ It has a white corolla and its throat covered with woolly hairs



▲ Its berries, globose and smooth, becomes reddish orange when ripe. The size of the berries is similar to that of a cow's eye, hence part of its name in Chinese “牛眼” (“a cow's eye”)

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its seeds, bitter in taste and cold in nature. They are used to unblock the meridian, activate collaterals, disperse swelling and relieve pain (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- Being one of the four most toxic plants in Hong Kong, the plant is toxic in its entirety, with toxic constituents including strychnine and brucine (*Atlas of Poisonous Plants in Hong Kong*).
- This herb is highly toxic and should be used with caution. Symptoms of poisoning include stiffness in the face and neck, and tonic-clonic seizure. Respiratory paralysis and heart failure may cause death in severe cases (*Common Toxic Plants in Hong Kong*).



▲ Herbal medicine:  
Strychni Angustiflorae Semen

# *Cibotium barometz* (L.) J. Sm.

Cibotii Rhizoma (Dicksoniaceae)

**金毛狗脊** 狗脊 (蚌殼蕨科)

▶ With distinctive regional features



- ▲ Plant: *Cibotium barometz* (L.) J. Sm., also known as “金毛狗” in Chinese
- Its leaves, tripinnatifid, pinnae alternate and have shallowly serrated margins



## Habitats

On the acidic soil  
at shade places in  
ravine edges and  
under forests



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Not applicable



- ▲ Its rhizomes, short and stout, are densely covered with golden brown long hairs and hence it is named “金毛狗脊” in Chinese, meaning “golden-haired dog spine”



- ▲ Sori are borne on the lower surface of ultimate lobes at the end of basal veins and will split into two halves when mature

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its rhizomes, bitter and sweet in taste, and warm in nature. They are used to drain wind-dampness, tonify the liver and kidney and strengthen the lower back and knees (*Pharmacopoeia of the People’s Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- Although this plant has been extensively collected outside Hong Kong for medicinal use, causing the decline in its number, it is widely distributed in Hong Kong and possesses distinctive regional features. It is a rare and precious plant protected by the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586).
- By decocting this herb in water with *Chaenomeles Fructus*, *Acanthopanax Cortex* and *Eucommiae Cortex*, it can treat lumbago and polyuria (*Chinese Materia Medica of Sichuan*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Cibotii Rhizoma*

# *Croton crassifolius* Geisel.

*Crotonis Crassifolii Radix* (Euphorbiaceae)

雞骨香 雞骨香 (大戟科)

▶ Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Croton crassifolius* Geisel., also known as “金錦楓” in Chinese
- Small shrub
- It is an annual plant whose branchlets, leaves and inflorescence are covered with stellate tomentum
- It has 3 to 5 basal veins, with 2 stipitate glands at the sides of the middle vein's



## Habitats

In thickets on slopes of dry hills and mountains



## Distribution

Cape D'Aguilar, Black's Link, Pok Fu Lam, Fanling, Yuen Long and Tai Long Wan



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
November to June of the following year  
Fruiting:  
February to September



- ▲ Raceme is developed at the top of the stem. While the plant has unisexual flowers, it is also monoecious, with male and female flowers, all in pale yellow, at the upper part and lower part of the rachis respectively



- ▲ Its capsules, subglobose, are covered in yellowish-brown tomentum

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter and pungent in taste, and warm in nature. They are used to move *qi*, activate blood, dispel wind, remove dampness, disperse swelling and relieve pain (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 2)*).

## Application and Features

- While the herb is mainly produced in Southwestern China, this plant is also distributed across Hong Kong.
- The plant is mildly toxic, and should be used with caution when administered orally. It can cure scrofula when taken as a medicinal liquor of this herb (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- External application of this herb can treat bites from venomous snakes (*Handbook of Commonly Used Chinese Herbal Medicines*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Crotonis Crassifolii Radix*

# *Glehnia littoralis* Fr. Schmidt ex Miq.

Glehniae Radix (Apiaceae / Umbelliferae)

珊瑚菜 北沙參 (傘形科)

▶ Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Glehnia littoralis* Fr. Schmidt ex Miq.
- Perennial herb. The whole plant is densely covered with white long soft hairs
- Leaves are basally arranged, pinnate with long petioles, while leaflets are elliptic/obovate-elliptic/ovate circular in shape with denticulated margins (upper left)



## Habitats

On sandy beaches or grown in loose, fertile sandy soil



## Distribution

Ham Tin Wan and Tai Wan



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
April to July  
Fruiting:  
April to July



▲ Its tiny white flowers aggregate on the top of branches to form compound umbels, while its flowering branches are densely covered with white tomentum



▲ Its fruits are nearly spherical or elliptic, covered with brown villose hairs and have wings on the ribs

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, sweet and mildly bitter in taste, and mildly cold in nature. They are used to nourish *yin*, clear the lung, boost the stomach, and engender fluid (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China*, 2020).

## Application and Features

- This rare and precious plant has a relatively low distribution in Hong Kong. It is presumed that its seeds drifted over at sea results limited growth of this plant along the coast of Hong Kong.
- The plant mainly grows on sandy land along the northern coast and hence its herb is named “北沙参” in Chinese, meaning “Northern Coastal Glehnia Root” (*Materia Medica of China*).
- The plant is often used to make soup with Polygonati Odorati Rhizoma to strengthen the effects of tonifying *yin*, moistening the dryness, engendering fluid and clearing the heat (*200 Healthy Soup Recipes*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Glehniae Radix

# *Lindera aggregata* (Sims) Kosterm.

Linderae Radix (Lauraceae)

烏藥 烏藥 (樟科)

► Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Lindera aggregata* (Sims) Kosterm.

- Evergreen shrub or small tree
- Leaves are alternately arranged, ovate in shape with ternate veins; green and glossy on the upper surface while pale white on the lower surface



## Habitats

On sunny mountain slopes, in valleys or thin forests and thickets



## Distribution

Pat Sin Leng and  
Lai Chi Wo



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to April  
Fruiting:  
May to November



- ▲ Its flowers are sessile and arranged in umbels, often with 6 to 8 inflorescences clustering around short shoots



- ▲ Its globose drupes are red when mature before turning into black

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its root tubers, pungent in taste and warm in nature. They are used to move *qi*, relieve pain, warm the kidney and dissipate cold (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- The plant is distributed along the coast of Hong Kong but is mainly produced in inland areas such as Zhejiang, Anhui and Hunan, with Zhejiang topping the amount of production, of which Tiantai Spicebush produced in Tiantai County, Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province, is classified as *Daodi* medicinal material (*Materia Medica of China*).
- Originated from the *Comprehensive Recording of Divine Assistance*, Tian Tai Combined Spicebush Root Powder, in which *Linderae Radix* serves as the chief medicinal, is used to move *qi*, soothe the liver, dissipate cold and relieve pain.



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Linderae Radix*

# *Paris polyphylla* Smith var. *chinensis* (Franch.) Hara

Paridis Rhizoma (Liliaceae)

七葉一枝花 重樓 (百合科)

▶ Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



## Habitats

Under forests or  
in tussock along  
ravine edges



## Distribution

Mount Parker,  
Shek O Road,  
Lantau Island and  
Tai Tung Shan

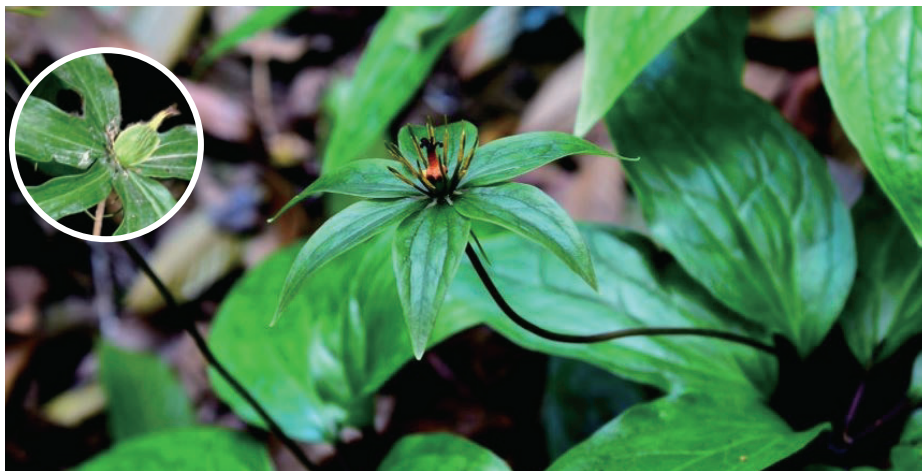


## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
May to July  
Fruiting:  
August to November

▲ Plant: *Paris polyphylla* Smith var. *chinensis* (Franch.) Hara, also known as “華重樓” in Chinese

- Perennial herb
- Leaves are oblong in shape and whorled with 5-11 leaves on each whorl



- ▲ Its yellowish-green flowers are solitary and terminal with 6 tepals in leaf-like shape, forming a 2-whorl structure with the leaves below that resembles a tower and hence its nickname is “重楼” in Chinese, meaning “overlapping tower”

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its rhizomes, bitter in taste and mildly cold in nature. They are used to clear heat, remove toxins, disperse swelling, relieve pain, cool the liver, and settle fright (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This is a rare and precious plant in Hong Kong. Paridis Rhizoma is mainly produced in areas such as Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou.
- This herb is slightly toxic. As it is very effective in relieving the toxins of bugs and snakes, it is also called “蚤休” in Chinese, meaning “flea stoppers” (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- This herb can be smashed with Houttuyniae Herba and applied externally to treat swollen furuncles (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).
- This herb is used to treat cancer and tumour, often in combination with other herbal medicines such as Salviae Chinensis Herba, Scutellariae Barbatae Herba and Prunellae Spica (*Oncology of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Paridis Rhizoma

# *Peucedanum praeruptorum* Dunn

Peucedani Radix (Apiaceae / Umbelliferae)

白花前胡 前胡 (伞形科)

▶ Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Peucedanum praeruptorum* Dunn
- Herb
- Basal and stem leaves are ternate, bipinnatifid or tripinnatifid and crenate



## Habitats

On the edge of hillside forests, by roadsides or tussock on partially shaded hills



## Distribution

Ham Tin Wan and Clear Water Bay



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
August  
Fruiting:  
August



▲ Compound umbels are mostly terminal or lateral



▲ Cremocarps are elliptic with linear dorsal and middle ridges

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter and pungent in taste, and mildly cold in nature. They are used to direct *qi* downward, resolve phlegm, disperse wind and clear heat (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- *Peucedanum praeruptorum* Dunn is sparse in Hong Kong.
- Peucedani Radix specialises in directing *qi* downward, and is effective in treating various symptoms including phlegm heat, panting, cough, stuffiness and fullness in the chest and diaphragm, and vomiting. As the *qi* goes down, fire is reduced to clear phlegm, rendering this herb a rejuvenating effect vital for treating phlegm and *qi*-related illnesses (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- This herb is effective in treating cough when such symptom first appears and can treat illnesses such as acute bronchitis (*Pharmaceutics of Chinese Medicines*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Peucedani Radix

# *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Jacq.) A. DC.

Platycodonis Radix (Campanulaceae)

桔梗 桔梗 (桔梗科)

▶ Distributed in unique habitats of Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Jacq.) A. DC.

- Herb
- Campanulate corolla in bluish-purple
- Leaves are whorled, partly whorled or all alternately arranged



## Habitats

On sunny grass slopes



## Distribution

Hong Kong Island,  
Castle Peak and  
Long Ke



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
July to September



◀ Flower buds resemble filled hot air balloons

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter and pungent in taste, and neutral in nature. They are used to diffuse the lung, soothe the throat, dispel phlegm and expel pus (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This is a rare and precious plant in Hong Kong.
- This plant is widely cultivated in northern China, but it is sparse in Hong Kong where it is mainly found in the tussock on hills. Hong Kong is the southernmost natural habitat of this plant.
- The roots of this plant are sturdy and straight. Hence, it is named “桔梗” in Chinese for such features (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- Platycodonis Radix is hailed as “a vehicular herb” as it can direct the effects of other herbs to appear specifically in the upper body (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- Together with Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, this plant can treat lung abscess (*Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber*).
- Together with Aurantii Fructus, this plant can relieve painless fullness in the chest (*Dictionary of Chinese Materia Medica*).
- Koreans consider *Platycodon grandiflorus* (Jacq.) A. DC. a vegetable and use its fresh roots to make kimchi (*Dictionary of Chinese Cooking*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Platycodonis Radix

***Gendarussa vulgaris* Nees** [Syn. *Justicia gendarussa* Burm. f.]  
Gendarussae Herba (Acanthaceae)

小駁骨 小駁骨 (爵床科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Gendarussa vulgaris* Nees

- Subshrub
- Leaves are narrow lanceolate and arranged in decussate phyllotaxis



**Habitats**

In thickets next to villages or by roadsides



**Distribution**

Tsuen Wan, Shing Mun, Tai Po, Kiu Tsui and Tung Lung Island



**Flowering and Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
March to April



- ▲ Flowers are white or pink with purple spots and their lower lips are split in 3 shallow lobes with protruding palates

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its aerial parts, pungent in taste and warm in nature. They are used to eliminate stasis, relieve pain, and reconnect sinews and bones (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is often used to treat bone injuries and is usually planted near villages in Hong Kong.
- Use with caution during pregnancy. To treat wind dampness and rheumatic pain, this herb can be taken orally as a decoction, or applied externally by smashing the fresh plant or grinding it to powder for application (*Compendium of Materia Medica*).
- Its leaves can be used as pesticide (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: Gendarussae Herba

***Hedyotis hedyotidea* (DC.) Merr.** [Syn. *Oldenlandia hedyotidea* (DC.) Hand.-Mazz.]  
Hedyotidis Caulis (Rubiaceae)

牛白藤 牛白藤 (茜草科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Hedyotis hedyotidea* (DC.) Merr.

- Liana shrub
- Its oppositely-arranged leaves have a scabrous upper surface and a lower surface that is covered by pubescence



**Habitats**

In ravine thickets or  
hillside fields



**Distribution**

Across Hong Kong



**Flowering and  
Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
January to December  
Fruiting:  
January to December



- ▲ Its types of inflorescence are umbel and compound dichasium. Its white corollas are densely arranged in subglobose shape

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal part of this plant is its lianoid stem, mildly sweet in taste and cool in nature. It is used to clear heat, release summer heat, dispel wind, activate collaterals, disperse swelling and relieve pain (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).

## Application and Features

- Referred to as “old ladies’ nest” (“亞婆巢”) by Hakka people.
- This herb is one of the ingredients for a herbal tea for prevention and treatment of heat stroke, cold and cough (*Handbook of Commonly Used Chinese Herbal Medicines*).
- The leaves and roots of *Hedyotis hedyotide* (DC.) Merr. can be used for medicinal purposes. Its leaves can be used to clear heat and release summer heat, treat heat stroke, fever, vomiting, cold, wind-heat, cough, etc. For external application, use an appropriate amount of this herb, decoct the herb for washing or smash the fresh herb for applying to the wound for treating itching of skin and fracture, etc. The effects of its roots are the same as its lianoid stem (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).
- *Hedyotis Caulis* is nicknamed “土加皮” in Chinese for its effect of joining sinew and bones, resulting confusion with another Chinese medicine namely “五加皮” (“*Acanthopanax Cortex*”).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Hedyotis Caulis*

# *Ilex rotunda* Thunb.

Ilicis Rotundae Cortex (Aquifoliaceae)

鐵冬青 救必應 (冬青科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Ilex rotunda* Thunb.

- Shrub or tree
- Its branchlets are reddish-brown and cylindrical
- Its leaves are elliptical, with a base that extends downward into narrow wings (upper left)



## Habitats

In evergreen broad-leaved forests on hillsides and on forest edges



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to April

Fruiting:  
October to December



- ▲ Its flowers are unisexual, dioecious and white in colour, and they grow solitarily at leaf axils of annual branches



- ▲ When ripen, its fruits turn red and thick discoid stigmas bulge

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal part of this plant is its bark, bitter in taste and cold in nature. It is used to clear heat, remove toxins, drain dampness and relieve pain (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- It is a common ingredient of herbal tea.
- This herb can be taken orally as a decoction for treating “wind-heat” headaches caused by exogenous pathogenic factors and sore throat. Besides, it can be triturated into fine powder together with *Kadsuræ Coccineae Radix et Caulis*, *Sepiæ Endoconcha* and *Zanthoxyli Armati Radix et Caulis* to be taken after meals to treat gastric ulcer (*Handbook of Herbal Medicines*).
- It is good for landscape and roadside planting on account of its sturdy trunk, wind-resistant branches, strong resistance to diseases and pests, and bird-attracting fruits (*Do you know about these trees?*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Ilicis Rotundae Cortex*

# *Justicia ventricosa* Wall.

Justiciae Ventricosae Herba (Acanthaceae)

大駁骨 大駁骨 (爵床科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Justicia ventricosa* Wall., also known as “黑葉小駁骨” in Chinese
- Perennial herb
- Its leaves are oppositely arranged and oblong-lanceolate in shape
- Its bracts are large, imbricate and overlapping



## Habitats

In thin forests near villages or in thickets



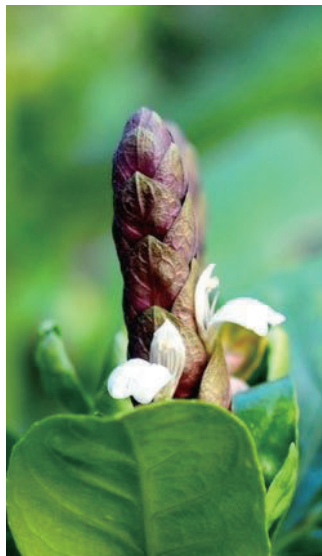
## Distribution

Happy Valley,  
Wong Nai Chung,  
Sai Kung, Sha Tin, Hin Tin,  
Ma On Shan Country Park,  
Chuk Kok, Sha Lo Tung  
and Wu Kau Tang



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to May



◀ Its numerous ivory flowers are arranged in spike with purple spots on their petals. Its upper lip is two-lobed and the lower lip shallowly three-lobed

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its aerial parts, pungent and bitter in taste, and neutral in nature. They are used to activate blood, relieve pain, reconnect sinews and bones and stanch bleeding (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 2)*).

## Application and Features

- The fresh herbs are often smashed or triturated with alcohol or vinegar and applied externally to treat broken bones (*Guidebook of Herbal Medicines*).
- This herb can be taken as a decoction or medicinal liquor for treating wind-damp impediment and pain but is contraindicated in pregnancy (*Application of Lingnan Folk Herbal Medicines*).
- The fresh herbs can be smashed and applied externally with brown sugar and liquor lees for treating mammary abscess (*Origin of Medicinal Materials*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Justiciae Ventricosae Herba*

## *Millettia speciosa* Champ.

Millettiae Speciosae Radix (Fabaceae / Leguminosae)

美麗崖豆藤 牛大力 (豆科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Millettia speciosa* Champ.

- Woody climber
- It has odd-pinnately compound leaves. It normally has 13 leaflets and its sulcate rachises are covered with rusty pubescence



### Habitats

In thickets,  
thin forests or  
wilderness



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
July to October  
Fruiting:  
February of the  
following year



▲ It carries axillary racemes of flowers with white corolla and round banners



▲ Its pods are strip-like, flat and in oblong shape, covered with dense brown tomentum

### Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, sweet in taste and neutral in nature. They are used to replenish deficiency, moisten lungs, strengthen sinews and activate collaterals (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).

### Application and Features

- The herb, both dried and fresh, is commonly sold in Hong Kong's wet markets. The fresh herb, together with *Smilacis Glabrae Rhizoma*, is often sold as soup packs.
- *Millettieae Speciosae Radix* can replenish deficiency, and strengthen sinews and bones. Regular use of this herb can improve health and body strength so that one can be as strong as an ox. Hence, it is named “牛大力” in Chinese, meaning “strong as an ox”.
- This herb can be used to prepare soup for treating kidney deficiency. Double pig's trotters with this herb can treat debility. This herb can also be taken as a decoction or medicinal liquor for treating cough caused by lung deficiency and sinew pain (*Jiangxi Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Millettieae Speciosae Radix*

# *Nephrolepis auriculata* (L.) Trimen

Nephrolepidis Rhizoma (Nephrolepidaceae)

腎蕨 石黃皮 (腎蕨科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



▲ Plant: *Nephrolepis auriculata* (L.) Trimen

- Herb
- Its pinnate leaves are in linear-lanceolate shape. Its alternate, lanceolate-shaped pinnae are plenty and often densely arranged in imbricate pattern



## Habitats

In the forest by  
the streams



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Not applicable



- ▲ Its kidney-shaped sori form a row at the apex of the upper veinlets above the lateral veins on both sides of the main vein

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its tubers, sweet, bland and mildly astringent in taste, and cool in nature. They are used to clear heat, drain dampness, moisten the lung, suppress cough and eliminate malnutritional stagnation (*Application of Lingnan Folk Herbal Medicines*).

## Application and Features

- Nephrolepidis Rhizoma is a common herb sold in Hong Kong's wet markets.
- The whole fresh herb is smashed and applied externally to treat traumatic bleeding and bites from venomous snakes (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- It is taken after decoction in water for treatment of cough caused by lung-heat and infantile malnutrition with stagnation (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- A Chinese Wampi look-alike, Nephrolepidis Rhizoma is yellow in appearance and juicy (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).
- Its branches and leaves, nicknamed "goat teeth" ("羊齒"), are often used as fillers in floral arrangements.



- ▲ Herbal medicine: Nephrolepidis Rhizoma

## *Smilax glabra* Roxb.

*Smilacis Glabrae* Rhizoma (Liliaceae)

光葉菝葜 土茯苓 (百合科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



### Habitats

In forests, at the bottom of thickets, along riverbanks or in valleys; also seen at forest edges and in thin forests



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:

July to November

Fruiting:

November to April of the following year

▲ Plant: *Smilax glabra* Roxb.

● Climbing vine

● Its blade is smooth and hairless. The lower surface is usually green, sometimes pale, and comes with tendrils



- ▲ It usually has ten-odd flowers with the type of inflorescence being umbel, and comes with short peduncles



- ▲ Its fruits become purplish black in colour and have a powdery surface when ripe

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its rhizomes, sweet and bland in taste, and neutral in nature. They are used to remove toxins, remove dampness, as well as benefit the joints (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is commonly sold in Hong Kong's wet markets in the form of fresh products. It is often used alongside *Millettiae Speciosae Radix* as soup ingredients.
- During the late Ming Dynasty (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century), medicine practitioners in China used *Smilacis Glabrae Rhizoma* for effective treatment of syphilis. The subsequent migration and spread of the herb overseas has driven the development of Chinese medicine culture to the West (*The Circulation Overseas of A Good Herb Named as Smilax Glabra for Syphilis in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century*).
- It is often used alongside *Dictamni Cortex*, *Kochiae Fructus*, *Sophorae Flavescentis Radix*, *Actractylodis Rhizoma*, etc. to treat damp-heat sore toxins (*Chinese Materia Medica*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Smilacis Glabrae Rhizoma*

## *Tradescantia spathacea* Sw.

Tradescantiae Flos, Tradescantiae Folium (Commelinaceae)

**紫萬年青** 蚌蘭花、蚌蘭葉（鴨跖草科） ▶ Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Tradescantia spathacea* Sw., also known as “紫背萬年青” in Chinese
- Herb
- Leaves are spirally arranged and grown in clusters at the apex of stems. They are olive green on the upper side and purplish red on the back



### Habitats

Mostly cultivated,  
grown on moist  
fertile land



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
September to February  
of the following year



▲ The white, axillary flower is wrapped by two clamshell-shaped purple bracts like a pearl in a clam and hence it is named “蚌花” in Chinese, meaning “clam-like flower”

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its fresh flowers and fresh leaves, sweet and bland in taste, and cool in nature. The fresh flowers are used to clear lung, eliminate phlegm, cool the blood, stanch bleeding, remove toxins and relieve dysentery while the fresh leaves are used to clear heat, remove toxins, resolve stasis and stanch bleeding (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- The fresh flowers are known as “蚌兰花” in Chinese, meaning “clam-like orchid flowers”. They are available at herb stores and can be taken as a decoction for treating cough caused by lung-heat (*Materia Medica of China*).
- The fresh leaves are known as “蚌蘭葉” in Chinese, meaning “clam-like orchid leaves”. They are smashed and applied externally to treat “蚌瘡” (“sores at labia majora”) (*Chinese Materia Medica of Guangdong*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Tradescantiae Flos et Folium*

*Vitex negundo* L. var. *cannabifolia* (Sieb. et Zucc.) Hand.-Mazz.  
Viticis Negundo Folium (Verbenaceae)

牡荊 牡荊葉 (馬鞭草科)

► Customary or historical use unique to Hong Kong



- ▲ Plant: *Vitex negundo* L. var. *cannabifolia* (Sieb. et Zucc.) Hand.-Mazz.
- Deciduous shrub
- Its leaves are oppositely arranged and palmately compound, with 5 or in rare cases 3 leaflets on each shoot; the leaflets are lanceolate in shape with coarse serrated margins



**Habitats**

In thickets on slopes  
and by roadsides



**Distribution**

Wong Nai Chung Gap,  
Quarry Bay, Fung Yuen  
and Lantau Island



**Flowering and  
Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
June to July  
Fruiting:  
August to November



▲ Terminal panicles. Corollas are light purple with 5 lobes at the apex

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are mainly its leaves, mildly bitter and pungent in taste, and neutral in nature. They are used to dispel phlegm, suppress cough and relieve wheezing (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- It is customary in Guangdong to take the decoction of specially-prepared *Vitidis Negundo Folium* for preventing heat stroke and treating food stagnation (*Application of Lingnan Folk Herbal Medicines*).
- The stems and leaves of this plant are decocted for fumigating and washing to treat foot tinea, rashes and itching (*Dictionary of Chinese Materia Medica*).
- The branches of this plant, which can burn longer, are used as firewood, as well as a mosquito-repelling fuel (*Application of Lingnan Folk Herbal Medicines*).
- The stem bark of this plant can be used to produce paper and artificial cotton (*Iconographia Cormophytorum Sinicorum*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Vitidis Negundo Folium*

## *Artemisia lactiflora* Wall. ex DC.

Artemisiae Lactiflorae Herba (Asteraceae / Compositae)

白苞蒿 鴨腳艾 (菊科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Artemisia lactiflora* Wall. ex DC.

- Perennial ratoon herbaceous plant
- Its leaves are green, alternately arranged, unipinnate to bipinnate, with serrate margins



### Habitats

Under forests,  
on forest edges,  
thicket edges or  
in valleys



### Distribution

Shing Mun and Tai Po



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
August to October



▲ Its white, small capitula are tightly arranged in spike

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its aerial parts, pungent and mildly bitter in taste, and mildly warm in nature. They are used to activate blood, dissipate stasis, regulate *qi* and disperse swelling (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- The herb is commonly sold in Hong Kong's wet markets.
- Decocted with brown sugar, this herb can be taken to treat various blood-related gynaecological patterns, such as amenorrhoea or premenstrual abdominal pain, postpartum abdominal pain caused by blood stasis or accompanied with cold and heat, as well as pain at limbs and joints. Should be avoided during pregnancy (*Dictionary of Chinese Materia Medica*).
- The fresh roots of the herb, decocted in water, can be taken to treat hernia (*Chinese Pharmacy Dictionary*).
- Edible as vegetable (*Vegetable Encyclopedia*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Artemisiae Lactiflorae Herba

# *Dicliptera chinensis* (L.) Juss.

Diclipterae Herba (Acanthaceae)

**狗肝菜** 狗肝菜 (爵床科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



## Habitats

Under thin forests,  
along the stream or  
by roadsides



## Distribution

Deep Water Bay,  
Sha Tin and Tai Po



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
July to December

- ▲ Plant: *Dicliptera chinensis* (L.) Juss.
- Perennial herb
- 6 blunt ridges in the stems with obviously enlarged nodes
- Leaves are simple and oppositely arranged, papery in texture and ovate-elliptic



- ▲ Cymes are axillary or terminal with two pieces of lobate bract beneath each flower, one large and one small. Corollas are 2-lipped and light purplish red

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Sweet and bitter in taste, and mildly cold in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to clear heat, remove toxins, cool the blood, stanch bleeding, engender fluid and promote urination (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- Commonly sold in Hong Kong's wet markets, the herb is often used as a main ingredient for preparing herbal tea. The herbal decoction can be taken to prevent heatstroke.
- To treat frequent urination, brew the herb in boiled water and take it with honey (*Common Folk Herbal Medicines of Guangxi*).
- To treat cold and pyrexia, decoct the herb with *Bidentis Bipinnatae Herba* and *Centellae Asiaticae Herba* for consumption (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- Edible as a vegetable (*Taiwan Good Vegetables and Field Food for Twenty-four Solar Terms*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: Diclipterae Herba

## *Elephantopus scaber* L.

Elephantopi Herba (Asteraceae / Compositae)

地膽草 地膽草 (菊科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Elephantopus scaber* L.

- Perennial herb
- Leaves are mostly basally arranged. They are spatulate with nearly no petiole



### Habitats

On open hill-slopes,  
by roadsides and along  
forest edges of valleys



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
July to November



- ▲ Capitula are fascicled and grow at the top of branches. Its basal part is embraced by three pieces of lobate bract and its flowers are light purple

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Bitter and pungent in taste, and cold in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to clear heat, purge fire, cool the blood, remove toxins, clear heat and drain dampness (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- The dried root of this plant, with a self-explanatory Chinese name “地膽頭”, is widely used in the Lingnan region as an ingredient for preparing soup with a unique fragrance.
- To treat toothache, rinse the mouth with the medicinal liquor in which the root is poached (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- To treat cough due to tuberculosis, double boil lean pork with this herb for consumption (*Quanzhou Materia Medica*).
- The herbal decoction can treat illness such as cold and tonsillitis (*Materia Medica of China*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: Elephantopi Herba

## *Glechoma longituba* (Nakai) Kupr.

Glechomae Herba (Lamiaceae / Labiatae)

活血丹 連錢草 (唇形科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Glechoma longituba* (Nakai) Kupr.

- Perennial creeping herb
- Leaves are oppositely arranged, heart-shaped or nearly kidney shaped. The surface is unevenly wrinkled with crenated margins



### Habitats

In dank places of forest edges, thin forests, on grassland or along the stream



### Distribution

Lai Chi Chong and Kop Tong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
April to May  
Fruiting:  
May to July



◀ Verticillasters are axillary and generally with 2 flowers. Corollas are light blue or light purple

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its aerial parts, pungent and mildly bitter in taste, and mildly cold in nature. They are used to drain dampness, relieve stranguria, clear heat, remove toxins, dissipate stasis and disperse swelling (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- The fresh herb can be used to treat urinary calculi with *Plantaginis Herba* and icterohepatitis with *Bidentis Bipinnatae Herba* (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- To relieve joint pain, drain wind-dampness and treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, pestle the plant into juice and mix it with liquor for consumption; applying the paste of the boiled herb to the head can also relieve pain (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- Edible as a vegetable and stir-fry with eggs (*Taiwan Herbs*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Glechomae Herba*, also known as “透骨消” in Chinese

## *Helicteres angustifolia* L.

Helicteris Radix (Sterculiaceae)

山芝麻 山芝麻 (梧桐科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Helicteres angustifolia* L.

- Small shrub
- Leaves are linear-lanceolate in shape and alternately arranged



### Habitats

On grassy slopes



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
May to August



- ▲ Cyme inflorescence develops at the axil, where pale purple flowers consisting of 5 petals each grow densely



- ▲ Its fruit, densely stellate hairy, is ovoid-oblong in shape and will split into 5 parts when ripe. The ripe fruit looks like the fruit of sesame and hence it is named “山芝麻” in Chinese, meaning “sesame in the hills”

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter in taste and cold in nature. They are used to relieve exterior syndromes, clear heat, remove toxins and disperse swelling (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is one of the ingredients for the 24 Herbs Tea.
- External application of the herb can treat bites from venomous snakes, hemorrhage due to trauma, haemorrhoid, anthracis and furunculosis (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).
- Decocting the herb in water with *Artemisiae Annuae Herba*, *Carthami Flos*, *Urenae Lobatae Herba* and *Zanthoxyli Radix* for oral administration can cure cold and pyrexia (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).
- The whole plant can be of medicinal use but it is slightly toxic. An overdose may cause diarrhea, nausea, etc. The herb should not be used during pregnancy or on physically weak patients (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Helicteris Radix*

## *Ilex asprella* (Hook. et Arn.) Champ. ex Benth.

*Ilicis Asprellae* Radix et Caulis (Aquifoliaceae)

梅葉冬青 崗梅 (冬青科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Ilex asprella* (Hook. et Arn.) Champ. ex Benth.

- Deciduous shrub
- The surface of its cylindrical branches is sparsely covered with lenticels that look like the markings on the arm of a steelyard and hence it is named “秤星樹” in Chinese, meaning “steelyard markings tree”
- Arranged alternately and ovate in shape, its leaves are glossy with small serrated margins



### Habitats

In thin forests in hilly landscapes or thickets by roadsides



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to April



▲ It has white flowers and is dioecious



▲ It has berry-shaped drupes which will darken when ripe

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots and stems, bitter and sweet in taste, and cool in nature. They are used to clear heat, remove toxins, engender fluid, quench thirst, soothe the throat, disperse swelling, dissipate stasis and relieve pain (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).

## Application and Features

- It is a common raw material to prepare herbal tea.
- To treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, furunculosis, swelling and allergic dermatitis, smash fresh leaves of the plant and apply externally (*Materia Medica of China*).
- It is often used together with Phragmitis Rhizoma and Puerariae Lobatae Radix to treat cold (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- It is used together with Polygoni Chinensis Herba and Eupatorii Chinensis Radix et Rhizoma to cure acute tonsillitis (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).



▲ Herbal medicine:  
Ilicis Asprellae Radix et Caulis

***Murraya exotica* L.** [Syn. *Murraya paniculata* (L.) Jack]  
Murrayae Folium et Cacumen (Rutaceae)

**九里香** 九里香 (芸香科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Murraya exotica* L.

- Small evergreen tree
- The plant has odd-pinnately compound leaves. Ovate-shaped leaflets with oblique bases are arranged alternately



**Habitats**

On flatlands near sea coasts, gentle slopes and in thickets on small hills



**Distribution**

Across Hong Kong



**Flowering and Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
April to August  
Fruiting:  
September to December



- ▲ The plant has a cyme inflorescence in which white flowers consisting of 5 petals each are developed. It is named after its aromatic fragrance which can be smelled from far away when it blooms



- ▲ Its berries are ellipsoid shaped and will turn from green initially to reddish orange when ripe

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its leaves and twigs with leaves, pungent and mildly bitter in taste, and warm in nature. They are used to move *qi*, relieve pain, activate blood and dissipate stasis (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China*, 2020).

## Application and Features

- To treat eczema, decoct the plant's fresh stems, twigs and leaves in water, then wipe and clean the affected area with the decoction (*Chinese Herbal Medicines of Fujian*).
- The alcoholic extracts of its stems and leaves, have topical anesthetic effects (*Materia Medica of China*).
- The nobility in ancient times placed the bark or resin of the plant in an incense burner together with other fragrances (e.g. Agarwood, Rosin) to perfume their clothes.
- As the branches and leaves are well tolerate to pruning, it is suitable as landscaping, hedging or potted plant (*Changing Flower Pots*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Murrayae Folium et Cacumen*

# *Pterospermum heterophyllum* Hance

Pterospermi Radix (Sterculiaceae)

翻白葉樹 半楓荷 (梧桐科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Pterospermum heterophyllum* Hance

- Tree
- Leathery leaves



## Habitats

On slopes, plains  
and in thin or  
dense forests



## Distribution

Ho Chung,  
Tai Mo Shan,  
Tai Po, Pat Sin Leng,  
Kop Tong, Au Ha,  
Ha Wo Hang, Ma Wan  
and Lantau Island



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
September to November



◀ Flowers are white with 5 petals each, and with sepals covered by densely stellate hairs on their upper and lower surfaces

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, sweet and mildly astringent in taste, and mildly warm in nature. They are used to dispel wind, remove dampness, relax sinews, activate collaterals, disperse swelling and relieve pain (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).

## Application and Features

- Young and mature leaves have different shapes. Leaves from young trees or sprouting branches are shield-like; lobed leaves resemble maple leaves; unlobed leaves look like lotus leaves, while leaves from mature trees are long and oval-like. The various leaf shapes lend the tree its nickname “半枫荷” in Chinese, which means “half maple half lotus” (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- To treat lumbar strain, chronic low back and leg pain, this herb can be used to prepare medicinal liquor for oral consumption. To treat chronic rheumatoid arthritis, add *Millettiae Speciosae Radix*, *Litsea Radix* and *Entadae Caulis* to the medicinal liquor. To treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, blood stasis and its associated pains, add *Rhizoma Chinensis Radix et Caulis* and *Sarcandrae Herba* to the medicinal liquor. This concoction is also effective when applied externally (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Pterospermum Radix*

# *Sarcandra glabra* (Thunb.) Nakai

Sarcandrae Herba (Chloranthaceae)

草珊瑚 腫節風 (金粟蘭科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Sarcandra glabra* (Thunb.) Nakai

- Subshrub
- Stems and branches are glabrous with enlarged nodes
- Leaves are oppositely arranged with coarsely-serrated margins and glands at the teeth tips



## Habitats

On the hills, in shaded and moist areas in ravine woods



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:

June

Fruiting:

August to October



- ▲ Terminal spikes grow in clusters at the apex of stems with ovately triangular bracts. Flowers are small and yellowish green with no perianth



- ▲ Drupes are spherical and bright red when ripe

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Bitter and pungent in taste and neutral in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to clear heat, cool the blood, activate blood, resolve macule, dispel wind and unblock the collaterals (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- To treat rheumatic diseases caused by wind-dampness, the leaves can be taken orally as a decoction (*Materia Medica of China*).
- To treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow and bone fracture, the leaves can be smashed for external application (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- The fibres of this plant have recently been made into a natural antibacterial plant-based textile.



▲ Herbal medicine: *Sarcandrae Herba*

***Schefflera octophylla* (Lour.) Harms** [Syn. *Schefflera heptaphylla* (L.) Frodin]  
Schefflerae Cortex (Araliaceae)

鵝掌柴 鴨腳木 (五加科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Schefflera octophylla* (Lour.) Harms

- Tree
- Leaves are palmately compound and alternately arranged, with 6 to 9 leathery elliptic leaflets on each shoot, resembling goosefeet in shape. Hence, it is named “鵝掌柴” in Chinese, meaning “goosefeet wood”



**Habitats**

On sunny hills



**Distribution**

Across Hong Kong



**Flowering and  
Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
August to September  
Fruiting:  
December to February  
of the following year



▲ Umbels grow in clusters to form large terminal panicles. Flowers are white with 5 petals each



▲ Berries are spherical and dark purple when ripe

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its stem bark and root bark, pungent and bitter in taste, and cool in nature. They are used to clear heat, relieve exterior syndromes, dispel wind, remove dampness, relax sinews and activate collaterals (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is one of the ingredients for the 24 Herbs Tea.
- To treat diseases such as allergic dermatitis, eczema and lacquer dermatitis, boil the leaves of this tree in water for bathing to dispel wind (*Materia Medica of China*).
- After steaming and sun-drying, this herb can be used to prepare medicinal liquor to dispel wind. To remove toxins which cause flecks and rashes, this herb can be taken orally as a decoction (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- This plant is the main source of nectar during winter in Lingnan's countryside. Its nectar can clear heat, invigorate spleen and stomach, remove toxins, moisten dryness, etc.



▲ Herbal medicine: Schefflerae Cortex

***Vitex trifolia* L. var. *simplicifolia* Cham.** [Syn. *Vitex rotundifolia* L. f.]  
Viticeae Fructus (Verbenaceae)

單葉蔓荊 蔓荊子 (馬鞭草科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Vitex trifolia* L. var. *simplicifolia* Cham.

- Creeping shrub
- Leaves are simple, inverted-ovate and oppositely arranged. They are green on the upper side and greyish white on the back



**Habitats**

On sandy beaches,  
by seas and lakes



**Distribution**

Across Hong Kong



**Flowering and  
Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
July to September  
Fruiting:  
September to November



▲ Umbels form terminal panicles. Corollas are light purple and bilabiate with 5 lobes at the apex



▲ Drupes are globose, black when ripe and covered by the remnants of the calyx

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its fruits, pungent and bitter in taste, and mildly cold in nature. They are used to disperse wind-heat for soothing the head and ocular discomforts (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- To treat wind-heat and headaches, use this herb with Perillae Folium, Menthae Haplocalycis Herba, Angelicae Dahuricae Radix and Chrysanthemi Flos. Patients with stomach deficiency should be cautious with this formula (*Materia Medica of China*).
- To treat traumatic injuries from fall or blow, smash fresh leaves for external application (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).
- This herb is a natural fragrance with soothing properties. It can be used as pillow stuff for sleep-aiding (*Taiwan Herbs*).
- With its volatile oil to repel bugs, the herb is a natural insect repellent.
- This plant is an effective sand binder on coasts.



▲ Herbal medicine: Vitis Fructus

# *Zanthoxylum nitidum* (Roxb.) DC.

Zanthoxyli Radix (Rutaceae)

**兩面針** 兩面針 (芸香科)

▶ Common crude herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Zanthoxylum nitidum* (Roxb.) DC.

- Woody climbers
- Leaves are pinnately compound in odd numbers. Branches, rachises and leaflet midribs have short hook-like spines (upper left) and hence it is named “兩面針” in Chinese, meaning “double-sided needles”



## Habitats

On hills and slopes,  
plains in thin forests or  
in thickets



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to May  
Fruiting:  
September to November



▲ Panicles are axillary. Flowers are small, plentiful and light yellowish green



▲ Spherical follicles will split open when ripe, exposing glossy black seeds

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter and pungent in taste, and neutral in nature. They are used to activate blood, resolve stasis, move *qi*, relieve pain, dispel wind, unblock the collaterals, remove toxins and disperse swelling (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is commonly used in Hong Kong and is also known as “入地金牛”.
- This herb is slightly toxic and overdosage is inadvisable. Avoid taken with sour tastes food (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).
- To treat toothache, decoct this herb for mouth washing (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- To treat rheumatic diseases caused by wind-dampness and lumbar strain, use the medicinal liquor prepared with this herb (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Zanthoxyli Radix

## *Brucea javanica* (L.) Merr.

Bruceae Fructus (Simaroubaceae)

鴉膽子 鴉膽子 (苦木科)

▶ Source species of common commercial herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Brucea javanica* (L.) Merr.

- Evergreen shrub. Its young branches, petioles and inflorescences are covered in yellow pubescence
- Leaves are pinnately compound and in odd numbers. Leaflets are ovate-lanceolate with coarsely-toothed margins and are arranged oppositely



### Habitats

On moors or foothills,  
in thickets or thin  
forests



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
June to August  
Fruiting:  
August to October



▲ Panicles are axillary. Flowers are small, plentiful and yellowish green



▲ Drupes are long-ovoid and black when ripe. They taste extremely bitter, hence it is named “鴉膽子” in Chinese, meaning “crow’s gall bladder”

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its fruits, bitter in taste and cold in nature. They are used to clear heat, remove toxins, treat malaria and dysentery when consumed orally, and are used to remove warts when applied topically (*Pharmacopoeia of the People’s Republic of China*, 2020).

## Application and Features

- Recorded in the *Pharmacopoeia of the People’s Republic of China* and the *Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards*, Bruceae Fructus is used clinically by Chinese medicine practitioners.
- To treat malaria or dysentery, shells are often removed and the kernels are encased in the capsule or Longan Arillus for consumption (*Dictionary of Chinese Materia Medica*).
- To treat the common wart, apply on the lesion with *Brucea javanica* oil (*Dictionary of Chinese Materia Medica*).
- This herb is slightly toxic and harmful to the gastrointestinal tract, liver and kidneys. Patients with gastrointestinal haemorrhage and liver/kidney-related diseases should take it with caution. Oral consumption dosage should be in strict control. Large dosage or continuous use is not recommended (*The Pharmacopoeia of the People’s Republic of China: Notes on Clinical Application*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Bruceae Fructus

# *Dichroa febrifuga* Lour.

Dichroae Radix (Saxifragaceae)

常山 常山 (虎耳草科)

▶ Source species of common commercial herbal medicine



▲ Plant: *Dichroa febrifuga* Lour.

- Shrub
- Its branchlets are green, usually with a purple hue. The herb has dense serrate leaves



## Habitats

In dank forests



## Distribution

Victoria Peak,  
Tai Mo Shan,  
Sai Kung,  
Lam Tsuen and  
Lantau Island



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
February to April  
Fruiting:  
May to August



▲ Corymbose panicle develops at the top of the plant. Flowers are blue



▲ Its berries are blue

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, bitter and pungent in taste and cold in nature. They are used to induce vomiting of phlegm and treat malaria (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- Recorded in the *Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China*, *Dichroae Radix* is used clinically by Chinese medicine practitioners.
- This toxic herb with emetic side effects should not be taken in large quantities, and should be used with caution during pregnancy (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).
- In the 1930s and 1940s, Dichroine, an anti-malarial chemical substance, was found in *Dichroa febrifuga* Lour. when conducting research of anti-malarial Chinese medicines in China. However, side effects of the herb such as nausea and vomiting has limited its clinical application (*A New Chapter of Anti-malarial Chinese Medicines*).
- Using the herb together with *Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma* can treat excess phlegm in thoracic cavity and headache with loss of appetite (*The Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Dichroae Radix*

# *Centella asiatica* (L.) Urb.

Centellae Herba (Apiaceae)

積雪草 積雪草 (傘形科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



▲ Plant: *Centella asiatica* (L.) Urb.

● Creeping herb



## Habitats

On moist grasslands  
or ditch sides



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
March to August

Fruiting:  
March to August



- ▲ Its reniform leaf blade has a heart-shaped chip near its petiole, making it look like a chipped bowl, hence its nickname is “崩大碗” in Chinese, meaning “big chipped bowl”



- ▲ Pale purplish flowers grow in clusters at leaf axils

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Bitter and pungent in taste and cold in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to clear heat, drain dampness, remove toxins and disperse swelling (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- Pestling fresh *Centellae Herba* with water, then adding sugar to the filtered juice will make it a herbal tea for clearing heat, removing toxins, as well as clearing bad breath and acne (*Chinese Materia Medica of Guangdong*).
- Cooking the herb in boiling water and eating it together with ginger and vinegar stew can cure hernia (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).
- Modern studies have found that the herb's juice has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties which promote wound healing.



- ▲ Herbal medicine: *Centellae Herba*

# *Ficus hirta* Vahl

Fici Radix (Moraceae)

**粗葉榕** 五指毛桃 (桑科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



▲ Plant: *Ficus hirta* Vahl

- Evergreen shrub
- Its leaves, all or 3 to 5 deeply lobed, are arranged alternately with sparse, coarse hairs snugly covering the leaf surface



## Habitats

In open areas near villages or on forest edges on mountain slopes



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
January to December  
Fruiting:  
January to December



◀ Spherical hypanthodium inflorescence develops in pairs at the leaf axils with no petiole

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its roots, sweet in taste and mildly warm in nature. They are used to tonify *qi*, fortify the spleen, clear phlegm, resolve dampness, relax sinews and activate collaterals (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).

## Application and Features

- Fici Radix is often used for making soup with other ingredients such as chicken or pork. It has a coconut taste and can fortify the spleen, tonify the lung, treat cough due to lung deficiency as well as weakness and fatigue (*Slow-boiled Soup Recipes*).
- A relatively mild herb, it is nourishing but not overwhelming to the body. It is often used in the Lingnan region as a substitute for Astragali Radix (also known as “北芪”) to tonify *qi* and hence its nickname is “南芪” in Chinese.
- Double boiling pig’s trotters with this herb for consumption can improve breast milk supply in postpartum mothers (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- Since *Ficus hirta* Vahl often grows in the same areas as *Gelsemium elegans* (Gardn. et Champ.) Benth. and their roots are roughly similar, there have been cases of poisoning due to the adulteration of Fici Radix with Gelsemii Radix et Rhizoma in Hong Kong.



▲ Herbal medicine: Fici Radix

# *Lophatherum gracile* Brongn.

Lophatheri Herba (Poaceae)

淡竹葉 淡竹葉 (禾本科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



- ▲ Plant: *Lophatherum gracile* Brongn.
- Perennial Herb
- Erect and hollow culm with conspicuous knots
- Its alternately-arranged leaves are widely lanceolate in shape



## Habitats

On slopes, in woods,  
on forest edges or by  
shady roadsides



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
June to October  
Fruiting:  
June to October



▲ The inflorescence is a terminal spike-and-panicle

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its stems and leaves, sweet and bland in taste and cold in nature. They are used to clear heat, purge fire, relieve vexation, quench thirst, disinhibit urine and relieve stranguria (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- Lophatheri Herba has the effect of clearing heat and relieving vexation, and is effective against short voiding of dark urine or infantile night crying (*The Complete Dictionary of Chinese Medicines*).
- The herb, decocted in water, can be taken to treat fever, vexation and thirst (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Lophatheri Herba

*Melicope pteleifolia* (Champ. ex Benth.) T.G. Hartley [Syn. *Evodia leptae* (Spreng.) Merr.]  
Evdodiae Leptae Caulis et Cacumen (Rutaceae)

三叉苦 三叉苦 (芸香科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



- ▲ Plant: *Melicope pteleifolia* (Champ. ex Benth.) T.G. Hartley
- Evergreen shrub
- Its oppositely-arranged leaves has long petioles with triternate compound leaves (upper right)



#### Habitats

In evergreen  
broad-leaved forests



#### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



#### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
April to May  
Fruiting:  
August to September



- ▲ The inflorescence is an axillary corymbose panicle. Its flowers are small, unisexual and yellowish white in colour

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its stems and twigs with leaves, bitter in taste and cold in nature. They are used to clear heat, remove toxins, move *qi*, relieve pain, dry dampness and relieve itching (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- The bitter taste of Cantonese herbal tea comes from this herb.
- Folks would drink the decoction of *Evodiae Leptae Caulis et Cacumen*, *Helicteris Radix* and *Schefflerae Cortex* to prevent cold, reduce fever and ease inflammation in place of tea (*Application of Lingnan Folk Herbal Medicines*).
- The herbs can be applied externally by smashing or decocting for washing the skin to treat dampness, heat, sores, eruptions, itching, etc. (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine:  
*Evodiae Leptae Caulis et Cacumen*

# *Pandanus tectorius* Sol.

Pandani Fructus (Pandanaceae)

露兜樹 櫛罌子 (露兜樹科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



▲ Plant: *Pandanus tectorius* Sol.

- Small tree, with a lot of branches and aerial roots
- Its leaves, leathery and linear-lanceolate in shape, cluster around the apex of its branches. There are sharp spines at the leaf margins and at the midribs on the back side of its leaves (bottom left)



## Habitats

In sandy areas near the sea or introduced for cultivation as hedges



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:

May to August

Fruiting:

January to October



◀ Its elliptic-shaped collective fruits look like pineapples, hence it is named “假菠蘿” in Chinese, meaning “fake pineapple”

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its drupes, pungent and bland in taste and cool in nature. They are used to tonify the spleen, nourish blood, move *qi*, relieve pain, clear phlegm, drain dampness and improve vision (*Materia Medica of China*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is one of the ingredients for the 24 Herbs Tea.
- The fruits of *Pandanus tectorius* Sol. are collective fruits that are composed of drupes. Its drupes, decocted in water, can be taken to treat dysentery (*Materia Medica of China*).
- Its stems can be used to scrub containers such as woks and pots (*Illustrations of Native and Introduced Ligneous Plants of Taiwan*).
- Pandanus rice dumplings are wrapped in the leaves of *Pandanus tectorius* Sol. The leaf fibres can be used for weaving into handicrafts such as straw mats and hats (*Herbal Medicines and Herbal Tea in Hong Kong*).



▶ Herbal medicine: Pandani Fructus

## *Pholidota chinensis* Lindl.

Pholidotae Chinensis Herba (Orchidaceae)

石仙桃 石仙桃 (蘭科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



- ▲ Plant: *Pholidota chinensis* Lindl.
- It is an epiphytic herb living on rocks or trunks
- Its leaves are invert ovate elliptic, each with 3 relatively obvious veins



### Habitats

In forests or on forest edge trees; on cliffs or rocks



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:

July to September

Fruiting:

September to January of the following year



▲ Ovate pseudobulbs grow on rhizomes



▲ Capsules are invert ovate elliptic with 6 ridges

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Sweet and bland in taste and mildly cold in nature, the whole plant or its pseudobulb can be of medicinal use to nourish *yin*, clear heat, moisten lungs, and suppress coughs (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- It is a species listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and is protected by the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586).
- When cooked with meat, it adds umami to the cooking and serves to nourish *yin* and moisten lungs.
- If decocted in water with *Polygoni Perfoliati Herba* and *Solidaginis Herba*, this fresh herb can treat acute tonsillitis (*Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*).
- If decocted in water with *Pogonatheri Herba*, this herb can cure the problem of nocturnal emission (*Chinese Herbal Medicines of Fujian*).



▲ Herbal medicine: *Pholidotae Chinensis Herba*

# *Phyllanthus emblica* L.

Phyllanthi Fructus (Euphorbiaceae)

餘甘子 餘甘子 (大戟科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



▲ Plant: *Phyllanthus emblica* L.

- Deciduous tree
- Leaves are alternately arranged, often in 2 rows, and mostly appear to be pinnately compound leaves



## Habitats

In thin forests in hilly landscapes, thickets, the wilderness; or on the sunny side of ravines



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:

April to June

Fruiting:

July to September



▲ It has numerous tiny yellowish-green flowers on its branchlets



▲ Its drupes are globose shape, each with 6 longitudinal grooves

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its fruits, sweet, sour and astringent in taste and cool in nature. They are used to clear heat, cool blood, promote digestion, invigorate the stomach, engender fluid, and suppress coughs (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is commonly sold in Hong Kong's wet markets. When served raw, it tastes bitter at first, followed by a long after taste of sweetness, hence it is named as “餘甘” in Chinese, meaning “remaining sweetness”.
- It can be taken as a decoction for treating cold, fever, cough and sore throat (*Materia Medica of China*).
- If preserved with salt, this herb is particularly good for swollen and sore throat (*Fruit Therapy: Fruit Dietary Therapy for Wellness and Health*).
- If boiled with the heart and lung of a pig to make soup, this herb can treat asthma (*Materia Medica of China*).
- Pillow inners made of dried leaves of this plant are penetrating and cool, and have a refreshing scent that induces sleep (*Meals According to the Time of Day to Keep Your Organs Healthy*).



▲ Herbal medicine: Phyllanthi Fructus

***Polygonum chinense* L.** [Syn. *Persicaria chinensis* (L.) H. Gross]  
Polygoni Chinensis Herba (Polygonaceae)

**火炭母** 火炭母 (蓼科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



- ▲ Plant: *Polygonum chinense* L.
- Perennial herb
- It has alternate simple leaves, which are papery in texture and ovate or oblong-ovate in shape. There may be purplish-blue patches on its leaves (bottom left)
- Its stipules are sheath-shaped, membranous, amplexicaul and glabrous



**Habitats**

In valley wetlands and  
on hillside grasslands



**Distribution**

Across Hong Kong



**Flowering and  
Fruiting Periods**

Flowering:  
July to September  
Fruiting:  
August to November



- ▲ Its flowers are tiny in white with 5 deeply lobed perianths
- Its achenes are black in colour, and are concealed in juicy and transparent persistent perianths

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Sour and sweet in taste and cold in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to clear heat, drain dampness, cool blood, and remove toxins (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 3)*).

## Application and Features

- Its ripe fruits are as black as charcoal. There are purplish-blue patches, which are like burnt marks left by charcoal fire, on the leaf surface, hence it is named as“火炭母” in Chinese, meaning “the mother of charcoal”.
- If decocted in water with Abri Herba, this herb can treat damp heat and jaundice (*Chinese Herbal Medicines of Guangxi*).
- If decocted in water with Celosiae Cristatae Flos, fresh plants of this herb can treat women’s leucorrhoea (*Folk Herbal Medicines of Fujian*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine:  
Polygona Chinensis Herba

## *Sauropus spatulifolius* Beille

Sauropi Folium (Euphorbiaceae)

龍脷葉 龍脷葉 (大戟科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



▲ Plant: *Sauropus spatulifolius* Beille

● Small evergreen shrub

● Leaves are alternately arranged with short petioles, either obovate-oblong, ovate or spatula shaped. Veins are highlighted in greyish white. These leaves look like tongues and hence the plant is named “龍脷葉” in Chinese, meaning “dragon tongue leaf”. (Tongue is known as “脷” in the regions of Guangdong.)



### Habitats

Planted in herbal gardens, parks and around villages and houses



### Distribution

Across Hong Kong



### Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
February to October



- ▲ Flowers are unisexual and dark purple. They grow in fascicles in the middle-lower parts of branches with fallen leaves

## Nature, Taste and Functions

The medicinal parts of this plant are its leaves, sweet and bland in taste and neutral in nature. They are used to moisten the lung, suppress cough and open the bowels (*Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China, 2020*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is commonly sold in Hong Kong's wet markets.
- To treat cough induced by phlegm fire, prepare soup with lean pork and this herb for consumption (*Collection Record of Lingnan Herbal Medicines*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine: Sauropi Folium

# *Tadehagi triquetrum* (L.) Ohashi

Tadehagi Triquetri Herba (Fabaceae / Leguminosae)

葫蘆茶 葫蘆茶 (豆科)

▶ Ingredient of soup or herbal tea



▲ Plant: *Tadehagi triquetrum* (L.) Ohashi

- Subshrub
- Single compound leaves are arranged alternately. Similar to calabash in shape, hence, it is named as “葫蘆茶” in Chinese, meaning “calabash tea”



## Habitats

In the wilderness, hilly terrains, forest edges or by roadsides



## Distribution

Across Hong Kong



## Flowering and Fruiting Periods

Flowering:  
June to October  
Fruiting:  
October to December



- ▲ Flowers are purplish red and arranged in terminal racemes



- ▲ Pods are strip-like and oblong, with straight dorsal sutures and wave-like ventral sutures

## Nature, Taste and Functions

Mildly bitter in taste and cool in nature, the whole plant can be of medicinal use to clear heat, drain dampness, remove food stagnation and kill worms (*Chinese Materia Medica Standards in Guangdong Province (Volume 1)*).

## Application and Features

- This herb is one of the ingredients for making herbal tea.
- To treat the common cold, fever, throat swelling and soreness, make tea with this herb in place of tea leaves (*Handbook of Commonly Used Chinese Herbal Medicines*).
- To treat rheumatic soreness and pain caused by wind-dampness, double boil pig's trotters with this herb for consumption (*Quanzhou Materia Medica*).
- When making salted fish or meat, the folklore wisdom is to put in this herb to prevent maggot infestation (*Collection of National Herbal Medicine*).



- ▲ Herbal medicine:  
Tadehagi Triquetri Herba

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<i>Pterospermum heterophyllum</i> Hance	翻白葉樹	67
<i>Rhaphidophora hongkongensis</i> Schott	獅子尾	5
<i>Sarcandra glabra</i> (Thunb.) Nakai	草珊瑚	69
<i>Sauropus spatulifolius</i> Beille	龍脷葉	97
<i>Schefflera octophylla</i> (Lour.) Harms	鵝掌柴	71

<i>Smilax glabra</i> Roxb.	光葉菝葜	47
<i>Strophanthus divaricatus</i> (Lour.) Hook. et Arn.	羊角拗	17
<i>Strychnos angustiflora</i> Benth.	牛眼馬錢	19
<i>Tadehagi triquetrum</i> (L.) Ohashi	葫蘆茶	99
<i>Tradescantia spathacea</i> Sw.	紫萬年青	49
<i>Vitex negundo</i> L. var. <i>cannabifolia</i> (Sieb. et Zucc.) Hand.-Mazz.	牡荊	51
<i>Vitex trifolia</i> L. var. <i>simplicifolia</i> Cham.	單葉蔓荊	73
<i>Zanthoxylum nitidum</i> (Roxb.) DC.	兩面針	75

