PLANT FACT SHEET

Cynomorium coccineum L.

GENUS *Cynomorium* **FAMILY** Cynomoriaceae

COMMON NAMES Red thumb, Desert thumb

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Root - flavouring, Flower stalk, Stem, Leaves

The flower stalk is bitter-sweet and is regarded as a delicacy.
The leaves are eaten.
The root is dried and crushed and used as a condiment or flavouring.
The heart of the plant is peeled or dried and processed into flour to make porridge.

DESCRIPTION

The parasitic scarlet herb that attaches itself to the roots of saltwort (Atriplex sp.) and other plants. It can be dark red or purplish-black, The stem is fleshy and unbranched. It grows 10-20 cm high. The leaves are scale like. The flowers are very small and massed in clusters. They form a club shaped structure which sticks upwards.

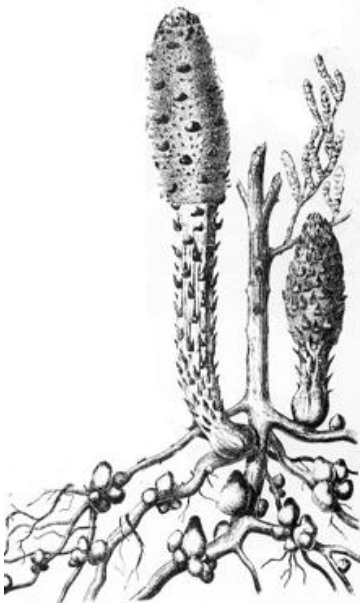
HABITAT

It grows on rocky and sandy ground. It is on salt marshes and often close to the coast. It is highly salt tolerant. The host plants - probably Atriplex dimorphostegia Kar. & Kir.; Atriplex halimus L.; Atriplex rosea L.; and Atriplex tatarica L. - were also gathered and eaten for their soft, mucilaginous leaves. In Bahrain it grows on Zygophyllum qatarensis. It can grow in arid places.

NOTES

There are one or two Cynomorium species. These are sometimes placed in the family Balanophoraceae. An emergency food mentioned in the Bible (Job 30:4).

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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