PLANT FACT SHEET

Crassocephalum crepidioides (Benth.) S. Moore

GENUS *Crassocephalum* **FAMILY** Asteraceae

COMMON NAMES Thickhead, Okinawan spinach

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Leaves, Tubers, Root, Vegetable, Flowers

The young leaves are eaten cooked as a vegetable. They have a sharp but not bitter taste. They are often eaten mixed with other foods. The leaves are blanched if used in salads. The flowers can be steamed and eaten.
The leaves have a smell which does not disappear with cooking.
The roots are eaten with chilli sauce or cooked in fish curry. They are also stir-fried.
Caution: It contains some alkaloids that are possible toxic. It should possibly not be eaten by pregnant women.

DESCRIPTION

A herb. An upright, annual plant about 1 m tall. The stem is thick and soft. The leaves are alternate and 16-18 cm long. The leaves have lobes, and have teeth around the edge. Sometimes the young leaves have a purple edge. The leaves often droop. A flower is yellow and reddish, and develops at the top, bending over at first, then becoming upright. Fluffy seed heads develop after flowering. The fruit is dark brown, with long, silky hairs at the end. The seeds blow in the wind.

HABITAT

A tropical plant. A common weed in Papua New Guinea from sea level to over 2500 m. It is more common in wet areas and in garden sites. It also grows in many other tropical countries. It prefers light shade. At ECHO. In Yunnan. In Sichuan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It grows from seed. It is self sown. Seedlings appear in about 9 days and can be transplanted when 8-12 cm high. A spacing of 25 cm by 25 cm is suitable. Plants are topped when 20 cm high to increase branching. To collect seed, the entire bundle is pulled from the receptacle with one hand, and the hairs removed with the other hand, without letting them mix with the seed.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The first leaf harvest can be made in 6-7 weeks. There can be 5-9 harvests over a 60 day period. Seed can be collected for sowing about 16 weeks after sowing.

NOTES

There are about 25-30 Crassocephalum species. C. crepidioides contains the hepatotoxic and tumorigenic pyrrolizidine alkaloid, jacobine.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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