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SOME COMMON WEEDS AND THEIR MEDICINAL USES*

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GOTUKOLA - *Centella asiatica* Linn.

Distribution Occurs in India, Ceylon and other tropical and subtropical countries. It is a very common weed in Ceylon growing in waste grassy places from sea level to the highest elevations.

Composition This herb contains the alkaloid, hydrocotyline and volatile oil, vellarine obtained principally from the roots. It is a good source of phosphorus, iron, calcium and other mineral constituents. It has a high percentage of vitamin B. A yellow neutral gum, centelloside has been isolated from local material. This resembles asiaticoside.

Uses This herb is said to have a direct action on lowering the blood pressure and is often referred to as a rejuvenating medicament. The leaves are eaten raw or finely cut and roasted with scraped coconut. They are believed to purify the blood and cure indigestion, nervousness and dysentery. In some parts of India, the leaves are dried, powdered and taken with milk, to improve the memory.

The plant is useful both internally and externally for skin diseases, chronic and obstinate eczema, secondary and tertiary syphilis with ulceration, enlargement of glands, leprosy, abscesses and chronic rheumatism It has a special influence on the urino-genital tract and set up urinary and ovarian irritation. It has been employed as a diuretic in several diseases.

An ointment prepared from the liquid extract of the plant with ghee is used as an external application on elephantiasis, enlarged scrotum, while the liquid extract is given internally. The expressed juice of the leaves with cow's milk and powdered root of *Glycyrrhiza glabra* L. is given as an alterative tonic.

HULANTALA - *Ageratum conyzoides* Linn.

Distribution A native of tropical America and now naturalized in all tropical countries including India and Ceylon. It is a vexatious weed in Ceylon.

Composition The leaves contain an alkaloid, a volatile oil containing sesquiterpenene and a vegetable principle known as "co umarin". The vegetative and reproductive organs of the plant yield hydrocyanic acid.

Uses The leaves are commonly used for wounds and sores. In Indo-China, the roots and leaves are a common remedy diarrhoea and dysentery.

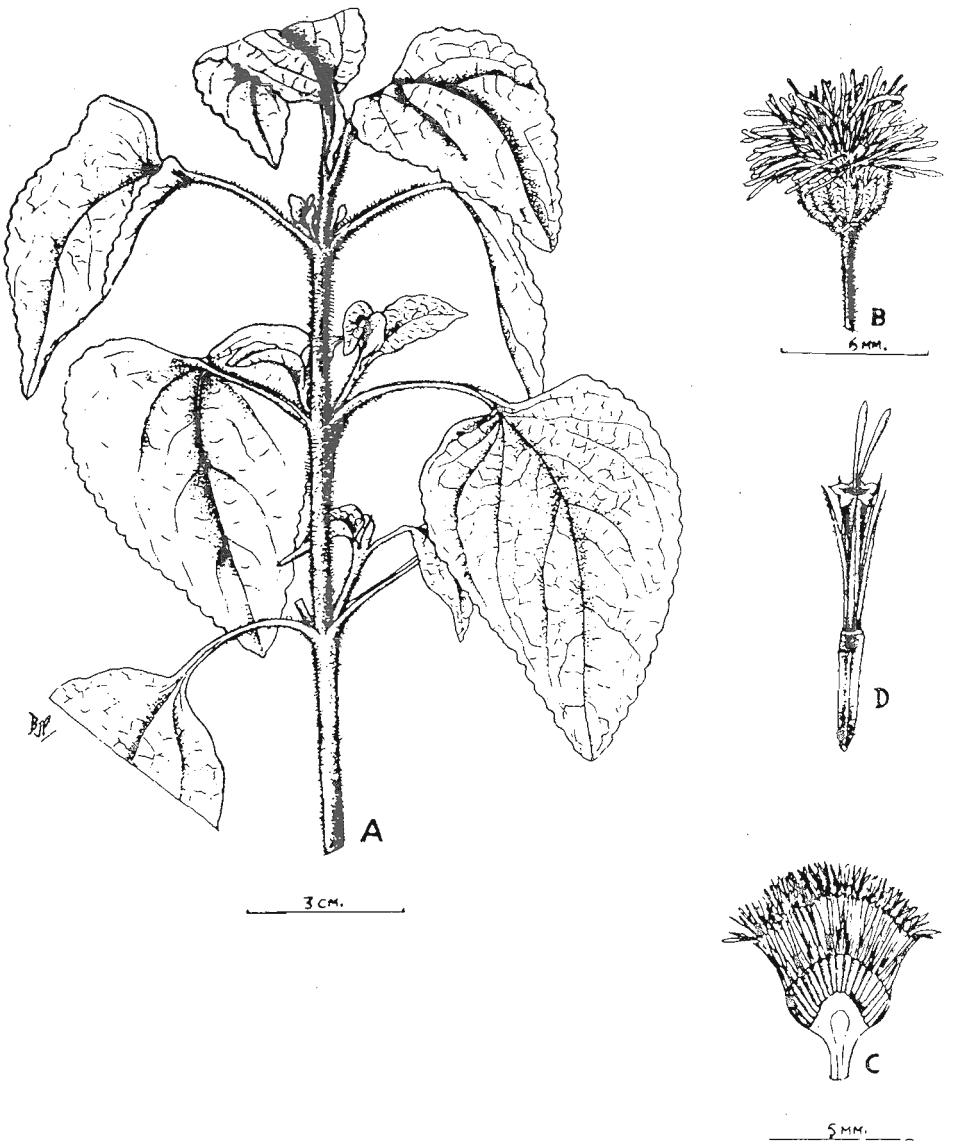
The leaves are supposed to prevent tetanus if applied to wounds. In Brazil, a decoction of the plant is given for diarrhoea, intestinal colic with flatulence, rheumatism and vesical catarrh. In Central Africa, the leaves are used for healing wounds especially those caused by burns.It is also a purgative and the roots employed for colic. The plant is a household medicine in Madagascar and La Reunion. The leaves and stems are used as a fomentation in skin diseases particularly

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Centella asiatica. A, portion of stem with leaves and fruit. B, flower lateral view. C, fruit.



Ageratum conyzoides. A, top of a plant. B. flower head lateral, view. C, longitudinal section of a flower head. D, flower, lateral view.

leprosy. A poultice of the leaves is applied on boils. A cold decoction of the root is used as a lotion for purulent ophthalmia.

PENELA-WEL - *Cardiospermum* Trim.

Distribution Occurs in India, Ceylon and Malacea in wet places. In Ceylon, it grows in the mid and low- country.

Composition This plant contains saponin and quebrachitol and an alkaloid, a glucoside, resins and tannins. The seeds possess an essential oil.

Uses The whole plant is used both internally and externally in cases of rheumatism, nervous diseases, dropsy and orchitis. The juice of the plant is used as ear drops for earache and discharge from the meatus. It is also used for piles, bronchitis and phthisis. The root is an emetic and laxative and considered an aperient. The leaves are boiled in castor oil and applied externally on rheumatic pains, swellings and tumours. In China, the plant is considered an anthelmintic and anti-blenorrhagic. In Africa, an infussion of the leaf is given as an enema for dysenteries and diarrhoeas and taken internally for general outbreak of sores in the body. It is used as an anti-rheumatic and in digestive and pulmonary disorders. The root is a laxative, demulcent, diuretic and used in nervous diseases. In East Indies, the leaf and root are used as a diaphoretic, diuretic and as a remedy for dropsy, orchitis, amenorrhoea, rheumatism, nervous complaints and lung diseases.

GIRAPALA - *Commelina diffusa* Burm.

Distribution Grows throughout the tropical and subtropical regions of India, Ceylon, Malay Pennisula, China and in the Philippine Islands. It is a very common herb in shady places amongst grass in the low-country in Cylon.

Uses The bruised plant is applied to burns, itches and boils with beneficial results. In Ghana, it is pounded with seeds of *Leea guineensis* G. Don and *Piper nigrum,* made into a poultice in a heated plantain leaf and applied for relief of swellings of the groin. An eye lotion is prepared from it in Nigeria.

KALANDURU - *Cyperus rotundus* Linn.

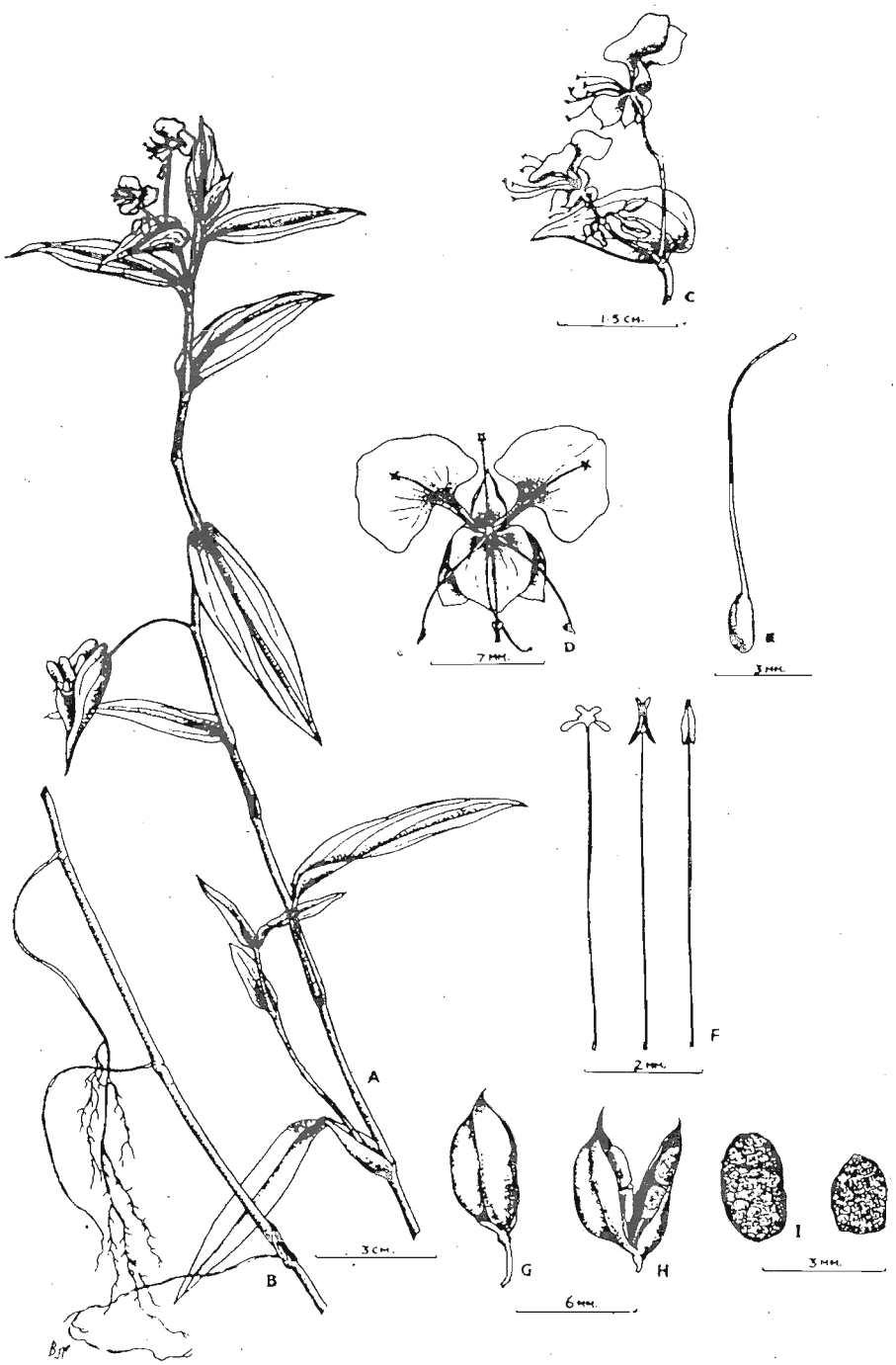
Distribution Occurs in all warm countries including India, Ceylon and Philippine Islands In Ceylon, it is a very common and vexatious weed in cultivated ground in the low-country.

Composition The tubers contain an essential oil, fat, sugar, gum, carbohydrates, starch, albuminous matter and an alkaloid. The crude volatile oil contains sesquiterpene ketone α - cyperone and has antibiotic properties.

Uses The tubers are astringent and anti- septic. A paste made with lime juice is applied in acne, scorpion stings and ulcers with beneficial effect. Internally, the tubers act as a stomachic, carminative and cholagogue with astringent properties and used in anorexia, acute dyspepsia diarrhoea, dysentery and congestion of the liver. They are also used in acute laryngitis, bronchitis and pneumonia. In India, they are held in great esteem as a diaphoretic, astringent, stimulant, tonic, diuretic and demulcent. A paste of the tubers is applied on the breasts as a galactagogue. In Indo-china they are given to women in child birth and to infants for indigestion. In Cambodia they are used in liver Complaints with jaundice, for malarial fever, etc. In the Philippine Islands,



Cardiospermum microcarpum. A, twig with leaves, flowers and fruits. B, flower dorsal view. C, flower lateral view with bud. D, dehisced fruit with seeds attached to the axis.



Commelina diffusa. A, branch with leaves and flowers. B, portion of the stem with fibrousroots. C, inflorescence with half the spathe removed. D, flower from front E, ovary, style and stigma. F, stamens. G, fruit. H, dehiscing fruit. I, seeds.



Cyperus rotundus. A, plant with leaves, rubers and inflorescence. B, a spikelet. C, a flower in the acil of a glume.

they are employed in dysentery and in Java for urinary disorders. In Vietnam, the plant is used as a diuretic and emmenagogue and for uterine haemorrhage.

KADUPARA - *Emilia sonchifolia* Linn.

Distribution A weed found commonly growing along with grass in most parts of India, Ceylon, Malaysia, China and other tropical countries. In Ceylon, it is abundant all over the island.

Composition The plant contains an alkaloid.

Uses Used as a salad before flowering, in Malaysia and Indo-China. In India, the juice of the plant mixed with sugar is given for bowel complaints. The pure juice is poured into the eyes, drop by drop, for night blindness and eye inflammations. In Indo-China, a decoction of the leaves is prescribed as an antipyretic. In Ceylon and in the Philippine Islands., the leaves are used as styptic for cuts and wounds and long-standing superficial ulcers. A decoction of the plant is given as an expectorant, anti-haemostatic and in cases of fever. In Malaya, the leaves are used for dressing ulcers and in decoction as a cure for coughs and phthisis and to arrest diarrhoea. The plant is used as an astringent, an anti-asthmatic and vulnerary in African and also to treat sore throat.

BINTHAMBURU, ELA-BINTHAMBURU, RATU-BINTHAMBURU - *Ipomoea asarifolia* (Desr.)

Distribution Occurs in South India and Ceylon. It is very common in moist places in the low-country in Ceylon.

Uses A tonic and alternative and is useful for anaemia, neurasthenia, general debility, chronic rheumatism and tertiary syphilis. It is used for poulticing sores, boils, skin eruptions, leprosy and elephantiasis. Along with other ingredients, it is used on fractures. The pounded leaf roasted in cow ghee is applied as a poultice on injuries of the eye with beneficial results. Medicinal oils, prepared with it are used for removing poisonous substances from the body.
The green variety is frequently used medicinally and so is the red-leaved variety.

HIN-MADU - *Ipomea angustifolia* Jacq.

Distribution A weed found in the tropics of the old World. In Ceylon, it is common in open places in mid and low-country.

Uses Used as an ingredient, along with other drugs, as an application on the scalp for head ailments of people bitten by poisonous snakes. Milch cows fed on this plant are supposed to yield more milk.

PITAWAKKA - *Phyllanthus debilis* Klein

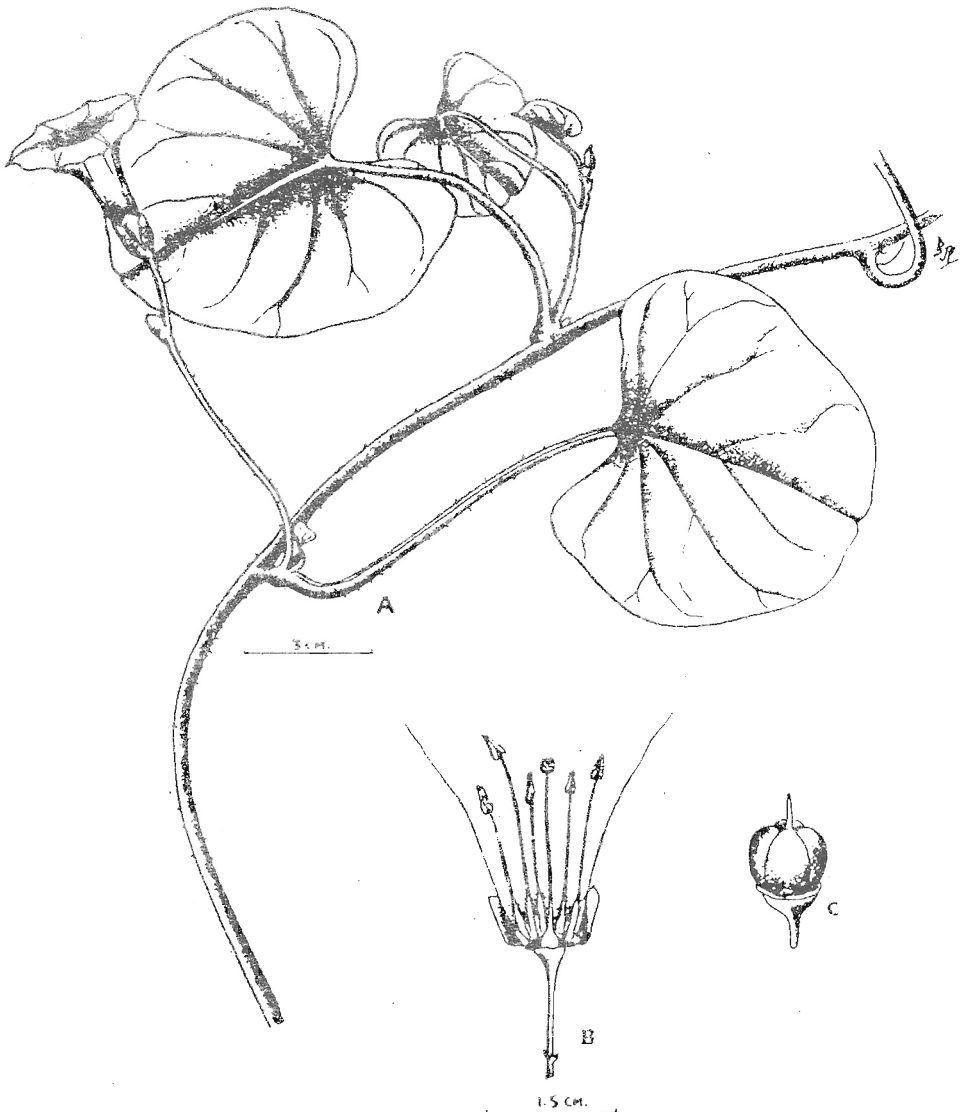
Distribution Occurs throughout the tropics including the Philippine Islands, except in Australia. In Ceylon, it is a common weed in waste and cultivated ground.

Composition Contains phyllanthin and a considerable amount of potash.

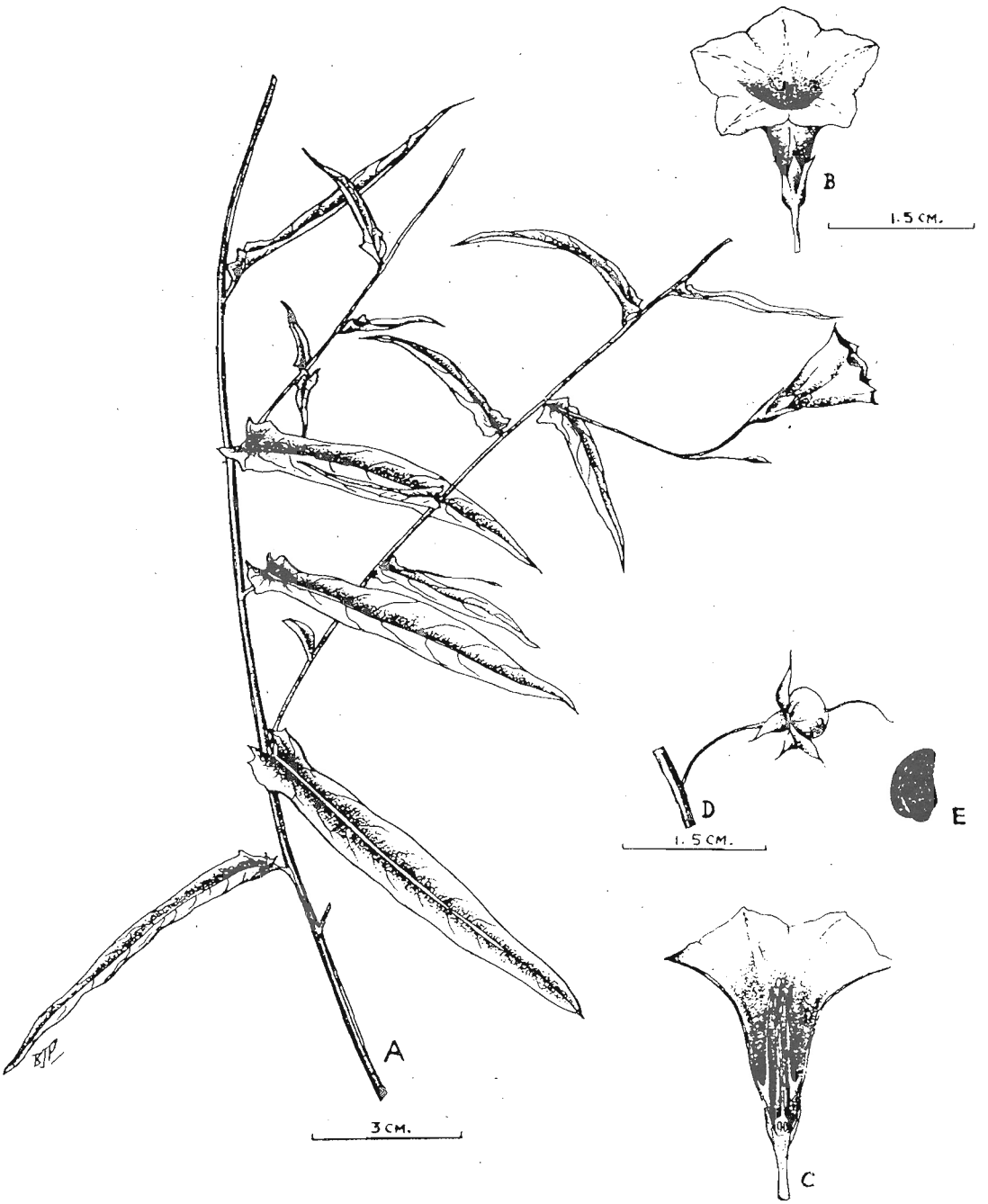
Uses Much used as a diuretic in dropsical affections, gonorrhoea and to allay griping in dysentery and in intermitent fevers. The fresh root is said to be an excellent remedy for jaundice. The milky juice is effective on offensive sores. The fruits are useful in tubercular ulcers, wounds, sores, bruises, scabies and ringworm.



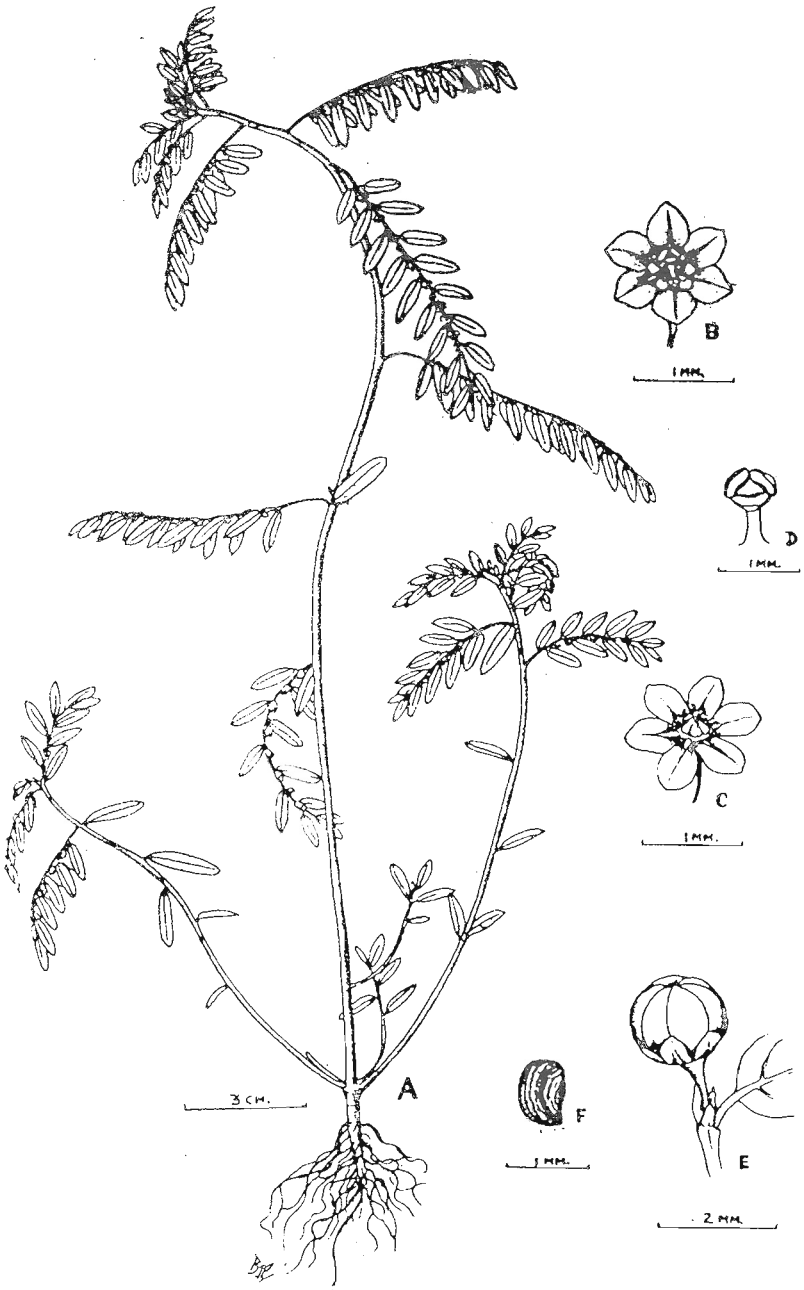
Emilia sonchifolia. A, flowering branch. B, typical leaves on a stem. C, flower head from side. D, flower, side view. E, fused anthers. F, seed.



Ipomoea asarifolia. A, portion of a brancn with leaves and a flower. B, flower with corolla opened out. C, fruit.



Ipomoea angustifolia. A, part of the stem with leaves. B, side view of flower. C, longitudinal section of flower. D, fruit. E, seed, enlarged.



Phyllanthus debilis. A, plant with branches, leaves and flowers. B, dorsal view ov male flower. C, dorsal view of female flower. D, dehiscing anthers. E, fruit. F, seed.

In Ceylon, the expressed juice of the plant is given as a diuretic in gonorrhoea and the root along with other drugs for diarrhoea, while the whole plant ground to a paste is given with cow's milk for jaundice.

MONERAKUDIMBIYA - *Vernonia cinerea* (L.)

Distributions Occurs throughout India, Ceylon, tropical Asia, Africa and Australia. In Ceylon, it is a very common weed everywhere.

Composition The leaves contain an alkaloid

Uses A stomachic and carminative and used for dyspepsia, flatulence and colic. It is said to be a diaphoretic. The fresh juice of the leaves is used in dysentery, piles and colic. The root is given as a vermifuge and also employed in dropsy. The flowers are administered for conjunctivitis and seed as an anthelmintic. The entire plant is used in the treatment of coughs, asthma, bronchitis and consumption. The crushed leaves are applied externally on wounds and sores.



Vernonia cinerea. A, apical portion of a plant with the inflorescenece. B, flower head. c, side view of a flower. D, fruit.