

Atropa acuminata

No Image

Family: Solanaceae

Local/common names:

Indian belladonna, Jharka, Jalgi, Deadly night shade, Rub luffah

Trade name: Indian Belladonna

Profile:

The Indian belladonna is a poisonous plant, similar to the deadly nightshade, *Atropa belladonna*. The plant is used to prepare an important drug because of its medicinal properties found in the roots, foliage and flowers. The root is very poisonous and was used by the Greeks and Romans as poison. Due to over exploitation, the species has now become endangered in Indian Himalayas. It is almost extinct in Kashmir forests from where it was once exported.

Habitat and ecology: The plant is found at an elevation of 1,800-3,200 m and it prefers moist, sandy loam soil. It is found in the western Himalayas from Pakistan to Himachal Pradesh in forests and shrubberies. The plant is also cultivated in Afghanistan and Kashmir for its medicinal uses.

Morphology: It is a perennial, straight plant growing up to 1 m in height. The leaves are stalked, elliptic, lanceolate, acuminate, 7-16 cm long and 5-10 cm broad. The aerial parts die every year in autumn and new ones appear in the following year. The plant has a large tap root with many lateral rootlets. The flowers are yellow coloured, solitary and shortly stalked. The fruit on ripening is a purple black berry and mildly sweet to taste.

Distinguishing feature: *Atropa acuminata* is a 1-1.5 m in height with dichotomous branches and olive green leaves. The globular fruits are purple-black in colour.

Life cycle: Flowering and fruiting takes place from June-September.

Uses: The plant has several medicinal uses. It is used to make tinctures and plasters. Local communities use the plant as a plaster to reduce pain and control inflammation. It is used in the treatment of intestinal and biliary colic, in asthma, whooping cough, bladder and urethral spasms. Root extracts are used externally as an anodyne for rheumatism, neuralgic, lumbago and local inflammations. The drug obtained from the plant has useful pronounced effects in nervous complaints such as in convulsions, tetanus, hysteria, nervous trembling, neuralgia and delirium. The roots and shoots are useful as a cardiac sedative, antispasmodic, narcotic and diuretic. In homeopathy, the plant is very commonly used for different diseases including asthma and joint pain.

Market rate: Seeds are sold at the rate of Rs.200/- per kg.