

Cuscuta reflexa

No Image

Family: Convolvulaceae

Local/common names: The
Dodder Plant, Akashbel,
Amarvela, Amarbel, Strawlu

Trade name: Akashbel,
Amarbel

Profile:

Cuscuta (Dodder) is a genus of about 100-170 species of yellow, orange, red or rarely green parasitic plants. Its old folk names include devil's guts, devil's hair, devil's ringlet, goldthread, hailweed, hairweed, hellbine, love vine, pull-down, strangleweed, and witch's hair. It has very low levels of chlorophyll. Dodder seeds sprout at or near the surface of the soil. While dodder germination can occur without a host, it has to reach a green plant quickly. After dodder attaches itself to a plant, it wraps itself around it. If the host contains food beneficial to dodder, the dodder produces haustoria that insert themselves into the vascular system of the host. The original root of the dodder in the soil then dies. The dodder can grow and attach itself to multiple plants. Many nations have laws prohibiting import of dodder seed, requiring crop seeds to be free of dodder seed contamination.

Habitat and ecology: It is generally a parasitic plant occurring at an altitudinal range of 600-2800 m. It spreads from Afghanistan to Southwest China, throughout India and Ceylon, in Southeast Asia. It is a parasite on *Desmodium* spp, *Rubus* spp and *Viburnum* spp at 1700-2900 m in Kashmir. It is also found on *Zizyphus jujube* and *Vitex negundo* and has been known to kill these plants.

Morphology: The plants have dense interlacing masses of stout yellow to purplish stems with small fleshy bracts and lax clusters of fragrant white to pink flowers. The clusters are 2.5-10 cm long. The flowers are bell-shaped and 6-8 mm long, with short triangular reflexed lobes. The calyx lobes are rounded and pale green. The stamens are yellow. The fruits are fleshy and have 4 seeds.

Distinguishing features: The plant can be identified by its thin stems appearing leafless, with the leaves reduced to minute scales. This is a leafless climber on shrubs, spreading in nature, throwing profuse branches and parasitic, often covers the host shrub or other plants completely.

Life cycle: The plant is in flower from April-May, and fruiting takes place in the months of June-July.

Uses: The plant is purgative and is used internally in protracted fevers, as astringent and anthelmintic. Its decoction made with aromatics is given in flatulence, indurations in liver and diarrhoea. The infusion is used as a wash for sores and itching. The seeds are carminative and purgative. The poultice of seeds is applied as an anodyne. The powdered seeds are used as an anti-fertility drug. Also, the extract has shown anti-fertility activity on albino rats. The juice of the stems and branches is used to kill lice. It is useful for diseases of the eye and of the heart, in biliousness, and '*kapha*'. In Ayurveda, the plant has been described as acrid and bitter. It is used to as an aphrodisiac, alterative, and tonic. Even in the Yunani system of medicine, the herb has been described as having a bitter sharp taste and is attributed to have expectorant, carminative, tonic, anthelmintic, purgative, diaphoretic and diuretic properties. It purifies the blood, cleanses the body and lessens inflammation. It is used as a cure for jaundice, muscle and joint pains, paralysis, headache, and vomiting. The seeds are used as a sedative, diuretic, and are useful in the diseases of the liver and spleen, 'quartan' fever, chronic fevers, hiccough, purification of blood and cleansing bowels. The infusion is given in ophthalmia.

Market rate: Data not available