

Rubia cordifolia



Family: Rubiaceae

Local/common names:

Manjistha, Indian madder, Manjit,
Manjith, Tushuho

Trade name: Manjistha

Profile:

Rubia cordifolia is valued for its medicinal properties and its use as a dye. The plant is a climber and a red pigment prepared from its roots is used to prepare the dye.

Habitat and ecology: This is an herbaceous perennial found in the sub-tropical to temperate Himalayas at an altitudinal range of 1200-3300 m in marginal lands and forests. This plant is mainly found in shaded and moist forest banks. The plant is common throughout India, ascending up to an altitude of 3750 m. In Himachal Pradesh, it is widely distributed in almost all the climatic zones and has been collected from Mariarha-Bhujling, Jogindernagar, Bagsiad forest, Thujji-Barot, Shikari Devi and Nauni.

Morphology: The plant is a perennial, herbaceous, prickly, cylindrical, flexuous, climber, with very long roots with a thin red bark. The stems are often long and rough, with a grooved, woody base. The branches are scandent by means of numerous deflexed branchless leaves with petioles. The leaves are in whorls of four and are cordate-ovate to ovate-lanceolate. The flowers are in terminal panicles and glabrous cymes. The branches are trichotomous and spreading and the bracts are ovate, acute and leafy. The calyx has a long tube and is globose and glabrous. The corolla is greenish and five-lobed. The fruit is dymous or globose, smooth, shining, purplish black when ripe, fleshy, and sweetish in taste, with two small seeds.

Distinguishing features: This is an herbaceous prickly climbing perennial with very long reddish roots.

Life cycle: Flowering of the plant occurs during the months of June-September, while fruiting occurs in October-November.

Uses: The plant is used to treat skin infections. It is found effective in scabies and in infection with '*Tinea pedis*'. Its evaluation as an anticancer compound in the laboratory has been extensive, the extract showing weak activity in vitro and in vivo against standard tumour cell lines. A valuable dye, manjith, is obtained from roots and stems. It is used mainly in ointments used for dermatological disorders. The plant is used in rheumatism, pleurisy and other chest complaints. The root is used as an astringent, tonic and blood purifier and is also given in cases of urinary troubles, eyesores, liver complaints and spleen enlargements. They are also used internally to treat menorrhagia and other menstrual complaints. The root decoction and paste is employed in cases ulcerated skin as it has antibacterial properties, particularly against *Staphylococcus aureus*. Crushed roots are applied to cure insect and caterpillar bites and to treat poisonous cobra-bites and scorpion bites. A decoction of the leaves and stems are used as vermifuge. It is employed for dyeing cotton fabrics, blankets and carpets. The root is of great demand in the cosmetic industry for the colouring of medicinal oils, creams, and lotions. It is considered a blood purifier and used against fevers.

Market rate: This plant is available in the market at a rate of Rs.70-80/- per kg.