

Swertia chirayita

No Image

Family: Gentianaceae

Local/common names:
East Indian Balmony, Tikta,
Kirata-tikta, Bhunimba,
Chirata, Chirayita, Kiratticit

Trade name: Chiarata

Profile:

This plant is a native of the temperate Himalayas and is valued for its medicinal properties in Ayurveda and Unani systems of medicine. These properties of the plant are now endangering local populations due to overexploitation for the pharmaceutical industry.

Habitat and ecology: The plant is an annual found in temperate Himalayas at altitudes of 1200-3000 m from Kashmir to Bhutan and in the Khasi hills of Meghalaya at 1200-1500 m. In Himachal Pradesh, it is found in Dhauladhar (2800 m), Luwain forest (2600 m), Bagsiad-Janjheli in Mandi (1800 m), Kullu, Kangra and Rohru divisions (1800-2800 m). The plant succeeds in moist humus-rich soil of semi-evergreen forests.

Morphology: The roots of the plant are brown, twisted, tapering, with rootlets and about 5-10 cm in length. The plant itself is an erect annual, which grows up to a height of 1-1.5 m tall. The stems are robust, branching and cylindrical. The leaves of the plants are broadly lanceolate, 5 nerved and sessile. The flowers are borne in large panicles and are greenish yellow in colour and tinged with purple. The sepals and petals are four in number. The petals have 2 rounded glands at the base. The capsules are egg shaped, many sided, 6 mm in diameter and sharp pointed. The seeds of the plant are smooth and have many angles.

Distinguishing features: The leaves, flowers and fruits of the plant have a distinguished yellow tinge.

Life cycle: The plant flowers from July-October and the capsules form and shed by the months of October-November.

Uses: Chirayta is used as a bitter tonic without aroma or astringency. It is used as a febrifuge. It is administered as a tonic to people suffering from gout. In Indian medicine, chirayta is prescribed in a variety of forms and combinations in chronic fevers and anaemia. It has got the special reputation as a remedy for bronchial asthma and liver disorders. If taken with sandalwood paste, it is said to stop internal haemorrhage of the stomach. It is credited with tonic, anthelmintic and anti-diarrhoeal properties in Indian medical systems. Chirayta is also used in preparation of ayurvedic preparations. A strongly bitter tonic, it is an excellent remedy for a weak stomach, nausea, indigestion and bloating, and it has also been shown to protect the liver. It is also used in case of scorpion stings. Chirayta is also used for dyeing cotton cloth and in the liquor industry as a bitter ingredient.

Market rate: The market rate varies from Rs.300-350/- per kg depending on the prevailing market condition.