

A Field Guide to Plants of Singapore

- Common Wildflowers

Singapore is home to a very wide variety of wildflowers from diverse habitats. They come in many colours and shapes, grow spontaneously in many areas such as in the gardens, parks, open fields, and even by the roadsides and on pavements. They can be native to our region or introduced from other areas. Some even became naturalized over time.

Below is a simple key to identify wildflowers that can be found in Singapore. This list is not exhaustive but we hope you will find it useful in your wildflower explorations.

KEY TO THE COMMON WILDFLOWER PLANTS

1. Plants with long and slender stems, creeps or climbs, equipped with tendrils, hooks or spines to support climbing 2
Plants with single and erect main stem or trunk, or several erect main stems, do not need extra mechanical support 3
2. Leaves simple, deeply 5-lobed, smooth margin *Ipomoea cairica*
Leaves simple, ovate, elliptic or circular shaped with notched tip, smooth margin *Ipomoea pes-caprae*
3. Plants woody, mature plants are more than 1 m tall 4 (Shrubs)
Plants non-woody (herbaceous), mature plants are not more than 1 m tall 5 (Herbs)
4. Stipules present; lance shaped leaves; reddish stem, woody near the base *Ludwigia hyssopifolia*
Stipules absent; leaf blades with pinnate veins (one main vein with many smaller veins branching off from that main vein) *Stachytarpheta indica*
5. Leaves compound (one leaf blade divided into several leaflets) 6
Leaves simple (single leaf blade) 8
6. Stipules present (small, leaf-like part at the base of leaf stalk), leaves 4-leaflets; flowers pea-shaped, yellow, fruit peanut-shaped *Arachis pintoii*
Stipules absent 7

7. Leaflets ovate to lanceolate; flowers daisy-like, white ray florets surrounding yellow centre
 disk florets *Bidens pilosa*
 Leaflets oval; flowers white with yellow throat *Oxalis barrelieri*
 Leaflets heart-shaped; flowers yellow *Oxalis corniculata*
8. Stipules present, leaves round, hairy or smooth edge; sap or resin produced when bruised or
 cut *Euphorbia thymifolia*
 Stipules absent 9
9. Leaves with alternate arrangement, leaves elliptic, irregular toothed margin; flowers are
 compacted into head-like shape, red to orange; fruits usually dry
 *Crassocephalum crepidioides*
 Leaves with opposite arrangement 10
 Leaves with spiral or rosette arrangement 11
10. Flowers bilaterally symmetrical and showy
 Flower cluster, about 4 cm in diameter, petals white or yellow or purple
 ... *Asystasia gangetica* 'Alba'
 Flowers bilaterally symmetrical, spur-like appendage; stems 4-angled
 Leaves narrowly lanceolate; flowers white with purple dots
 *Andrographis paniculata*
 Flowers radially symmetrical, arranged umbrella-like; leaves kidney or round shaped,
 smooth .. *Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides*
 Flowers are compacted into one cluster, resembling single flower; leaves oval or lance
 shaped; fruits usually dry
 Stems reddish purple or light green, covered in white hairs; flower cluster white to
 purple *Ageratum conyzoides*
 Stems rounded and roots at nodes; leaves glossy; flowers solitary, daisy-like, yellow,
 stalked *Sphagneticola trilobata*
11. Leaves kidney shaped, wrinkled surface; flowers arranged umbrella-like
 *Centella asiatica*
 Leaves spoon-shaped, clustered in circular pattern close to ground; flowers purple to pink
 petals *Elephantopus scaber*

Below are some examples of the wildflower plants found in Singapore.

Ageratum conyzoides (Billy Goat Weed)

Family: Asteraceae



HERB erect growth habit, up to 60 cm tall

FOLIAGE smooth, oval shaped, serrated margin. Stipules absent.

FLOWER white to purple. Flowers continuously throughout the year

FRUIT dry, single-seeded fruits, dispersed by wind

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed land with nutrient poor soils

Andrographis paniculata (Bitterweed)

Family: Acanthaceae



HERB erect growth habit, up to 50 cm tall

FOLIAGE narrowly elliptic shaped, entire margin. Stipules absent

FLOWER tubular-shaped, white petals with purple dots, free-flowering

FRUIT green and flattened oval capsules, ripens to brown and dry before dehisce to release brown seeds

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, near waterbodies, roadsides, cultivated areas

Arachis pintoi (Yellow Peanut Plant)

Family: Fabaceae



SHRUB creeping growth habit, forming dense mat, up to 50 cm tall

FOLIAGE pinnate with 4 oval leaflets, entire margin. Stipules present.

FLOWER pea-shaped, yellow flowers, free-flowering

FRUIT peanut-shaped, located underground, brown seed

TYPICALLY FOUND seasonally waterlogged area, degraded soil, low fertility soil

Asystasia gangetica 'Alba' (Chinese Violet)

Family: Acanthaceae



HERB creeping growth habit, up to 1 m tall

FOLIAGE ovate shaped, entire margin. Stipules absent

FLOWER trumpet-shaped, white flowers with yellow throat, free-flowering

FRUIT green capsules, ripens to brown and dry before dehisce to release flat, circular black seeds

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, waterlogged, well-drained soils, along riverbanks

Bidens pilosa (Beggar's Tick)

Family: Asteraceae



HERB erect growth habit, up to 1 m tall

FOLIAGE trifoliate, saw-like teeth margin. Stipules absent

FLOWER daisy-like inflorescence, 4 – 7 white ray florets surrounding a yellow centre of disk florets

FRUIT bristly, barbed hooks at tip, black when ripe, attaches onto fur or feathers to disperse

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, infertile wastelands, hilly areas, drought-tolerant soils

Centella asiatica (Indian Pennywort)

Family: Apiaceae



HERB creeping growth habit, up to 1 m tall

FOLIAGE kidney shaped, rounded teeth margin. Stipules absent

FLOWER umbel inflorescence, greenish white

FRUIT round, flattened, brown when ripe, dispersed by water

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, moist soil, swampy areas, tolerant of full sun to shady conditions

REMARK similar to *H. sibthorpioides*, but *C. asiatica* has entire or crenate margin while *H. sibthorpioides* has shallow lobed margin.

Crassocephalum crepidioides (Redflower Ragleaf)

Family: Asteraceae



HERB erect growth habit with ribbed stem, up to 100 cm tall

FOLIAGE elliptic shaped, slightly lobed, irregular teeth at margin. Stipules absent.

FLOWER small clusters, tubular, red to orange, free-flowering

FRUIT small clusters shaped like puffballs, brown with fluffy white hairs, dispersed by wind

TYPICALLY FOUND abandoned areas, waste areas, plantations, roadsides

Elephantopus scaber (Elephant's Foot)

Family: Asteraceae



HERB up to 60 cm tall

FOLIAGE spoon shaped, arranged rosette-like. Stipules absent

FLOWER purplish or pink, free-flowering

FRUIT long, covered in soft hairs, cling on animals and humans for dispersal

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, shaded areas, wastelands

Euphorbia thymifolia (Thyme-leaved Spurge)

Family: Euphorbiaceae



HERB prostrate growth habit, up to 20 cm long with reddish stems

FOLIAGE round shaped, hairy. Stipules linear or lance shaped

FLOWER tiny clusters at leaf axils, free-flowering

FRUIT small, oval, seeds are release via explosive mechanism

TYPICALLY FOUND dry soils, sandy or gravelly soils, wastelands, disturbed areas

Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides (Lawn Pennywort)

Family: Apiaceae



HERB creeping growth habit, up to 10 cm tall

FOLIAGE light green, kidney to round shaped, shallowly 5-7 lobed margin. Stipules absent

FLOWER greenish white, free-flowering

FRUIT small, round, greenish-yellow turning brown with purplish stains when mature, seeds dispersed by water

TYPICALLY FOUND damp or wet areas, slopes

REMARK similar to *C. asiatica*, but *H. sibthorpioides* has shallow lobed margin while *C. asiatica* has entire or crenate margin.

Ipomoea cairica (Morning Glory)

Family: Convolvulaceae



CLIMBER creeping and climbing growth habit, up to 5 m tall

FOLIAGE palmate-shaped into 5 lobes. Stipules absent

FLOWER large, funnel shaped, purple, free-flowering

FRUIT round, split to release black hairy seeds, dispersed by wind, water and human movements

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, poorly drained areas

REMARK similar to *I. pes caprae*, but *I. cairica* has palmate-shaped leaves and purple flowers while *I. pes-caprae* has ovate, elliptic or circular-shaped leaves with notched tip and pink flowers.

Ipomoea pes-caprae (Beach Morning Glory)

Family: Convolvulaceae



CLIMBER creeping growth habit with thick tap root, up to 30 m long

FOLIAGE ovate, elliptic or circular-shaped with notched tip. Stipules absent

FLOWER large, funnel shaped, pink to violet, free-flowering

FRUIT round, split to release black seeds, seeds can float and dispersed by water

TYPICALLY FOUND sandy soils, adjacent to granite walls or reclaimed sites

REMARK similar to *I. cairica*, but *I. pes caprae* has ovate, elliptic or circular leaves with notched tip and pink flower while *I. cairica* has palmate-shaped leaves and purple flowers.

Ludwigia hyssopifolia (Water Primrose)

Family: Onagraceae



SHRUB erect growth habit, up to 2 m tall, woody near the base

FOLIAGE lance shaped. Stipules reddish and small.

FLOWER yellow, four-petaled, free-flowering

FRUIT cylindrical, hairy with numerous oblong seeds that are dispersed by water

TYPICALLY FOUND standing water, moist areas, clay and peat soils, disturbed areas

Oxalis barrelieri (Lavender Sorrel)

Family: Oxalidaceae



HERB erect, up to 1.5 m tall

FOLIAGE oval shaped, 3-leaflets, usually green with purplish leaf edge. Stipules absent

FLOWER white petals with yellow tube

FRUIT tiny, oval-shaped, seeds are dispersed by explosive mechanism

TYPICALLY FOUND dry or moist soil, sandy soil

Oxalis corniculata (Yellow Wood Sorrel)

Family: Oxalidaceae



HERB trailing growth habit, up to 10 cm tall

FOLIAGE compound, heart shaped leaflets. Stipules absent

FLOWER yellow, free-flowering

FRUIT cylindrical, hairy, splits open when ripe, releasing seeds by explosive mechanism

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, moist soils, cultivated areas, on rocks

Sphagneticola trilobata (Yellow Creeping Daisy)

Family: Asteraceae



HERB creeping growth habit, up to 70 cm tall

FOLIAGE oval to lance shaped with 3-lobes, toothed leaf edge, glossy green on upper side while paler green on the underside. Stipules absent

FLOWER daisy-like inflorescence, yellow

FRUIT tiny, oval shaped, brown

TYPICALLY FOUND damp or wet soil, near waterbodies, disturbed areas, open areas

Stachytarpheta indica (Indian Snakeweed)

Family: Verbenaceae



SHRUB much-branched and erect growth habit, up to 1 m tall

FOLIAGE elliptically or oval shaped, toothed leaf edge. Stipules absent

FLOWER blue, long inflorescence growing upright

FRUIT oblong shaped, splits into 2 single-seeded parts when ripe, seeds dispersed by wind

TYPICALLY FOUND disturbed areas, cultivated areas, along seashore

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