

# *Hiptage benghalensis* (L.) Kurz



**Common Name:** Hiptage

**Synonymy:** *H. madablota* Gaertn.

**Origin:** India, south China, Malaysia, Philippines

**Botanical Description:** Scrambling woody vine to 30 m (98 ft) long or large, spreading shrub to 5 m (16 ft) tall, with T-shaped hairs on flowers and foliage. Leaves opposite, simple, elliptic to ovate, reddish pink and lightly hairy when very young, maturing to glossy, dark green and glabrous (lower surface may retain hairs), to 15 cm (6 in) long and 7 cm (2.7 in) wide; margins entire and often glandular dotted below, bases tapering or rounded and often bearing two glands, tips gradually narrowing to a long, slender point; petioles dark, to 1 cm (0.4 in) long. Flowers many, very fragrant, to 2.5 cm (1 in) wide, borne in axillary clusters; corolla of 5-clawed, hairy, fringed petals, white to pinkish with one or more petals having a yellow dot in the center; sepals and flower stalks hairy; stamens 10 (9 short, to 0.7 cm [0.3 in] and 1 long, to 1.2 cm [0.5 in], style to 1.3 cm (0.6 in); the long stamen and style curling and protruding beyond the petals. Fruit a papery, three-winged samara, to 5 cm (2 in) long, with the central wing much longer than the other two.

**Ecological Significance:** Cultivated in many tropical regions as an ornamental for its showy, fragrant flowers (Jacobs 1955), and presumably introduced to Florida as an ornamental. Collected in south Florida as early as 1962 (FLAS). First documented from the wild in 1990 from Secret Woods Nature Center in Broward County, where it forms thickets in the native hydric hammock vegetation (P. Howell, Broward County Parks and Recreation, Oakland Park, FL, 2003 pers. comm.). Heavy vines cause native tree limbs to fall, and create a dense canopy that allows hiptage seedlings to thrive in the low light understory conditions (P. Howell, Broward County Parks and Recreation, Oakland Park, FL, 2003 pers. comm.). Reported as escaping cultivation at Fairchild Tropical Garden in 1992 (Austin 1998a). Nominated as one of the “100 World’s Worst Invasive Alien Species” (IUCN 2001). Very invasive on La Réunion and Mauritius, where it forms thickets in lowland forests and native dry forests and climbs over and smothers native vegetation (Lorence and Sussman 1988, Tassin and Riviere 1999). Invasive in Hawaii (HEAR 2002), where it is considered one of the most invasive horticultural plants (DOFAW 2001), and in tropical Queensland, Australia, where it escapes ornamental cultivation and spreads into natural areas (Batianoff and Butler 2002). In North Queensland, infestations

form 1-2 hectare thickets and plants are “quite abundant in the local area, but difficult to notice as they can blend in with the local riparian rainforest vegetation” (G. Vivian-Smith, Alan Fletcher Research Station, Department of Natural Resources and Mines and CRC for Australian Weed Management, Queensland, Australia, 2002 pers. comm.). In tropical Far North Queensland, infestations occur along creeks and rivers for several kilometers and range from low to very high density (P. Lawler, Queensland, Australia, 2003 pers. comm.). Mature vines climb up to 20 m into the canopy of remnant riparian forest, outcompeting native trees for sunlight and occasionally felling some with their weight (M. Setter, Alan Fletcher Research Station, Department of Natural Resources and Mines and CRC for Australian Weed Management, Queensland, Australia, 2002 pers. comm.). Targeted for preventative control in other parts of Australia because it is considered an environmental weed (Csurhes and Edwards 1998). May exhibit some toxicity to humans (CFSAN 1998).

**Distribution:** Herbarium specimens documented from Broward County (Wunderlin and Hansen 2002). Also escaped in Hawaii, La Réunion, Mauritius, and tropical Australia. Removed from FLEPPC Category II in 2003 because of successful control efforts. Targeted for removal from commercial production by FNGA/TBWG growers associations (FNGA 2001).

**Life History:** Occurs in open forests and forest edges (Backer and Van den Brink 1963), clearings, teak forests (Jacobs 1955), ravines, and moist places in its home range (USDA ARS 2002). Invades mainly dry to mountainous forests and open habitats in Mauritius (M.V. Sawmy, Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, Mauritius, 2002 pers. comm.). Prefers climates ranging from warm temperate to tropical (IUCN 2001). Tolerates a variety of soils and waterlogged to dry conditions (Jacobs 1955), but prefers well-drained soils (Whistler 2000). Tolerates full sun in the canopy and may dominate vegetation in deeply shaded areas (P. Lawler, Queensland, Australia, 2003 pers. comm.). In riparian areas in North Australia, young vines have very high recruitment rates and can occur in high densities, preventing natural regeneration of native forest trees (P. Lawler, Queensland, Australia, 2003 pers. comm.). Propagated by cuttings and seed (Whistler 2000). Seeds are readily dispersed by wind (HEAR 2002).