Gomphocarpus fruticosus | Plantz Africa

Introduction

*Gomphocarpus fruticosus* is a herbaceous, perennial, spindly shrub, often with watery or milky sap. It has ovoid fruits (follicles) of a clear, pale green colour, covered with prickles and narrowing into a curved tip, and almost looks like a tiny swan!

Description

The milkweed is a fibrous, multi-stemmed shrub, growing up to 1.5-2 m high. It is evergreen and hardy. Light brown stems branch higher up to form the crown. When cut, the stem exudes a milky latex. Leaves are pale to mid-green, long, narrow and opposite.

Attractive, creamy yellow flowers are carried in pendulous clusters. The fruit, borne in autumn, is an inflated, light brown, papery follicle, covered with bristle-like hairs and containing dark seeds. The seeds are attached from cotton-like, silky hairs that aid in their dispersal.
Distribution and habitat

Distribution description

*G. fruticosus* is widely distributed in the southern African region. It is often found growing in disturbed areas on the roadside and abandoned fields.

Uses

Use

The plant as a whole is poisonous to livestock. Foliage and the fruit are used in floral arrangements. Leaves are used as snuff and as a sedative in the treatment of headache and tuberculosis. Roots are used to relieve stomach pain and general aches in the body. The floss is sometimes used for stuffing.

Growing *Gomphocarpus fruticosus*

Grow

The milkweed is rarely cultivated other than in gardens of native plants and natural areas and it thrives in these habitats. Plants often increase rapidly from self-sown seeds. When cultivated, they generally succeed in ordinary soils in full sun. Because of their deep roots, they do not transplant readily. Best results are derived from raising plants from seeds or root cuttings and containing them in individual pots until they are planted.

References


Credits

Alec Naidoo
Pretoria National Botanical Garden
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