

Scientific Name:

Gerrardanthus tomentosus

Common Names:

None known



Photo credit: Alison Young/Paolo Candotti

Conservation Status

DD	LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW
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Vulnerable (VU)

Plant Type / Size

Perennial climber or creeper / can climb shrubs and trees (0.5-3 m) and up to a height of 15 m

A little-known member of the Cucumber family (Cucurbitaceae) that has separate male and female plants. Can be found at the base of sandstone cliffs among boulders and stones. The enormous semi-subterranean succulent caudices (with a single fibrous root) can grow so large that they may be mistaken for small boulders. Long shoots/stems bear alternate leaves and climb neighbouring shrubs and trees with the aid of forked tendrils. The tendrils, herbaceous stems and underneath of the leaves are "hairy" or densely tomentose (hence the specific epithet "*tomentosus*"). Aged stems become woody, grey-barked and covered in small, round tubercles – and can also be found ascending to the top of trees without a single leaf on. Leaves are dull green and angularly five- to seven-lobed. Separate yellow-brown female and male flowers. Seeds are winged and wind distributed.

Flowering Season:

January to March

 Spring	 Summer	 Autumn	 Winter
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Separate male and female plants and flowers (yellow-brown).

Drought Tolerance

Low	Moderate	High
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Caudex (root) stores water and nutrient reserves for the plant to overwinter.

Gardening Skill Needed

Low	Moderate	High	Expert
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Pot Plant Potential

Poor	Moderate	Good	Excellent
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Naturally grows under constrained conditions. Will need a high trellis / tree to climb up.

Water Regime

Water more in summer than winter. Moderate watering year-round.



Soil Type

Well-draining sandstone or sandy-type soils mixed with organic compost.

Ideal Position

Partial-shade. Natural: Grows well among boulders and stones in moist, shaded wooded areas, i.e. coastal/scarp forests.



How to Propagate

Seeds: Sow in Spring. Lightly cover winged seeds with coarse river sand / sandstone and water thoroughly. Keep in a moist, semi-shaded area. Seed-set occurs between two-and-a half and four years. Can take a few years to flower when grown from a seed.

Uses

Aesthetic: A very unique specimen. Makes for a feature plant due to the enormous caudex as well as the creeping nature - can grow up a tree or guided along a trellis.

Animal Interaction / Ecology

Insects pollinate the flowers. The succulent caudices are sought out by porcupines.



Distribution & Threats

Distribution: entirely confined within the Greater Durban Metropolitan Area and has only survived habitat degradation and urban expansion due to protected areas such as Krantzkloof NR and the inaccessibility of its habitat for development or agriculture.

Threats: Medicinal: The specific harvesting of this species for medicinal use is not considered a serious threat, however, caudices are harvested whole when mistakenly identified as the close relative, *Gerrardanthus macrorhizus* - a species which is used in traditional medicine. **Alien Plant Invasion:** Alien plants can outcompete the species and/or alter habitat structure/ecology to an unsuitable state. **Habitat Degradation:** Harvesting of firewood – can damage plants and have long-term effects on the habitat structure for the species