

# 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 pintoii* (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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