

Glorybush

Tibouchina urvilleana (DC.) Cogn.

Melastome family (Melastomataceae)

Post-Cook introduction

This introduced ornamental has escaped from gardens and become naturalized as a weed, forming impenetrable thickets. It has large showy flowers 3–4 inches (7.5–10 cm) across the five spreading violet or purple petals. Distinguished also by the paired elliptical, velvety hairy leaves with five main veins from base.

A tall evergreen shrub commonly 15 ft (4.6 m) high or becoming a small tree to 40 ft (12 m) high and 4 inches (10 cm) in trunk diameter, with few slender erect branches. Bark light gray, smoothish, thin. Twigs four-angled and slightly winged, stout, light green, with long greenish or pinkish spreading hairs, ringed at nodes; older twigs shedding hairy bark and becoming round.

Leaves opposite, elliptical, with very hairy leafstalk $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (6–19 mm) long. Blades elliptical, $2\frac{1}{4}$ –5 inches (3–13 cm) long and 1– $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches (2.5–6 cm) wide, longpointed at apex, blunt or rounded at base, edges straight, with five (sometimes seven) main veins from base; these and curved smaller veins sunken on upper surface and raised beneath. Upper surface yellow green, covered with pressed hairs; lower surface silvery or light green, velvety hairy. Dying leaves turning red above, silvery orange beneath.

Flower clusters (panicles) terminal, erect, large, branched, 3–5 inches (7.5–13 cm) long. Flowers several but not opening together, very large and showy, on short hairy stalks, composed of 2 large hairy pointed pinkish bracts or scales 1 inch (2.5 cm) long and rose-red buds; densely hairy calyx with narrow tube $\frac{5}{8}$ inch (1.5 cm) long, five narrow spreading hairy, reddish-tinged lobes almost as long, lobes shedding; five violet or purple petals about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (4 cm) long and nearly as broad, oblong, broad and straight at apex, widely spreading and falling early; 10 long threadlike purple stamens of two sizes, bent in middle, with narrow curved anthers; and pistil with hairy five-celled ovary, many tiny ovules, and long threadlike curved purple style.

Fruit an egg-shaped pale brownish capsule $\frac{5}{16}$ inch (8 mm) long, five-celled, with many small round seeds.

The wood is reddish brown, hard, strong, and difficult to cut. Not used.

This species has become naturalized and is classed as a weed in pastures and wastelands. It forms dense thickets by spreading vegetatively from roots, and cut branches also bear roots and grow.

Scattered, forming impenetrable tangles in moist open forests and roadsides at 1500–4000 ft (457–1219 m) altitude, especially in the Volcano area of the island of Hawaii.

Special areas

Wahiawa, Volcanoes

Range

Naturalized through the Hawaiian Islands from Kauai and Oahu to Hawaii. Native of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul) and widely cultivated as an ornamental.

Other common names

Urville glorybush, Hawaiian glorybush, tibuchina, lasiandra

Botanical synonym

Lasiandra urvilleana DC. Formerly identified as *Tibouchina semidecandra* Cogn., a related species also of Brazil.

Degener (1930) stated that it was introduced in about 1910 from South America, traced to an estate near Kurtistown, Hawaii. The first herbarium specimen was collected by Rock in August 1917 at Kalanilehua, Kilauea, Hawaii. It was spread by amateur horticulturists who took cuttings to their gardens. By 1930 this weed was observed in a garden near Honolulu. At that time Degener predicted the spread and also the replacement of native vegetation, which has since occurred. As he observed in 1970, this species exemplifies the difficulty of eradicating ornamentals cultivated in the islands that become weeds.

Two additional shrubby naturalized species in this family have become noxious weeds. Koster's curse, *Clidemia hirta* (L.) D. Don, has small white flowers and small blackish or purplish edible berries. *Melastoma candidum* D. Don (*M. melabathricum* auth., not L.) has large pink to purple flowers and small bristly berrylike fruits. They are of no forage value and may be found in wastelands, pastures, and lowland forests.



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Flowering twig and undeveloped fruits (lower right), $\frac{3}{8}$ X (Degener).