

India coralbean

Erythrina variegata L.

Legume family (Leguminosae)

Post-Cook introduction

Introduced deciduous ornamental tree with prickles, leaves with three broadly triangular leaflets, and showy red flowers when leafless, related to the native wiliwili. Medium-sized tree to 50 ft (15 m) or more in height. Bark gray, smooth, thin, with many small sharp black or brownish prickles. Twigs nearly horizontal, stout, green and finely hairy when young. Pea subfamily (Fabaceae).

Leaves alternate, compound, 8–12 inches (20–30 cm) long, with long slender leafstalk 4–5 inches (10–15 cm) long. Leaflets three, short-stalked, two paired and one largest at end, broadly triangular, 2½–6 inches (6–15 cm) long and broad, slightly broader than long, short-pointed at apex and almost straight at base, thin, shiny green above, becoming hairless or finely hairy beneath, with two dotlike glands at base of each leaflet.

Flower clusters (racemes) 6 inches (15 cm) or more in length on stout unbranched stalks 3–4 inches (7.5–10 cm) long, spreading and curved downward. Flowers many, crowded, short-stalked, spreading horizontally around axis and falling promptly, showy, more than 2 inches (5 cm) long, composed of narrow calyx 1–1¼ inches (2.5–3 cm) long, finely hairy and 3–5 toothed; corolla deep bright red or scarlet, with one very large curved petal (standard) 2–2¼ inches (5–6 cm) long and 1–1¼ inches (2.5–3 cm) wide and four small petals (wings and keel) about ¾ inch (2 cm) long; 10 brilliant red stamens 2¼ inches (6 cm) long, 9 united in lower half and 1 separate; and pistil with stalked narrow hairy ovary and curved red style. In Hawaii flowers are borne on leafless twigs after the leaves fall in January and February.

Fruits (pods) 6–12 inches (15–30 cm) long and 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide, flattened, slightly narrowed between seeds, dark brown or black, hairless, splitting open late. Seeds 6–10, beanlike, elliptical, 5⁄8–¾ inch (15–20 mm) long, dark reddish brown.

The wood is described as very lightweight and soft and is used elsewhere for boxes and fuel. It is reported that the bark and leaves have served in home remedies and that the bark has been employed for dyeing and tanning and for its fiber.

A rapidly growing ornamental, it is cultivated for the showy red flowers in late winter when leafless. The dark red seeds have been used for leis. These seeds, like those of related species, probably are poisonous.

Introduced primarily in lowlands of Hawaii. The Division of Forestry has planted about 900 trees in the Forest Reserves. An example may be seen along Round Top Drive above Manoa Valley in Honolulu. It is strictly an ornamental that has been planted in a few parklike settings in the forests.

Range

Native from India to southern Polynesia.

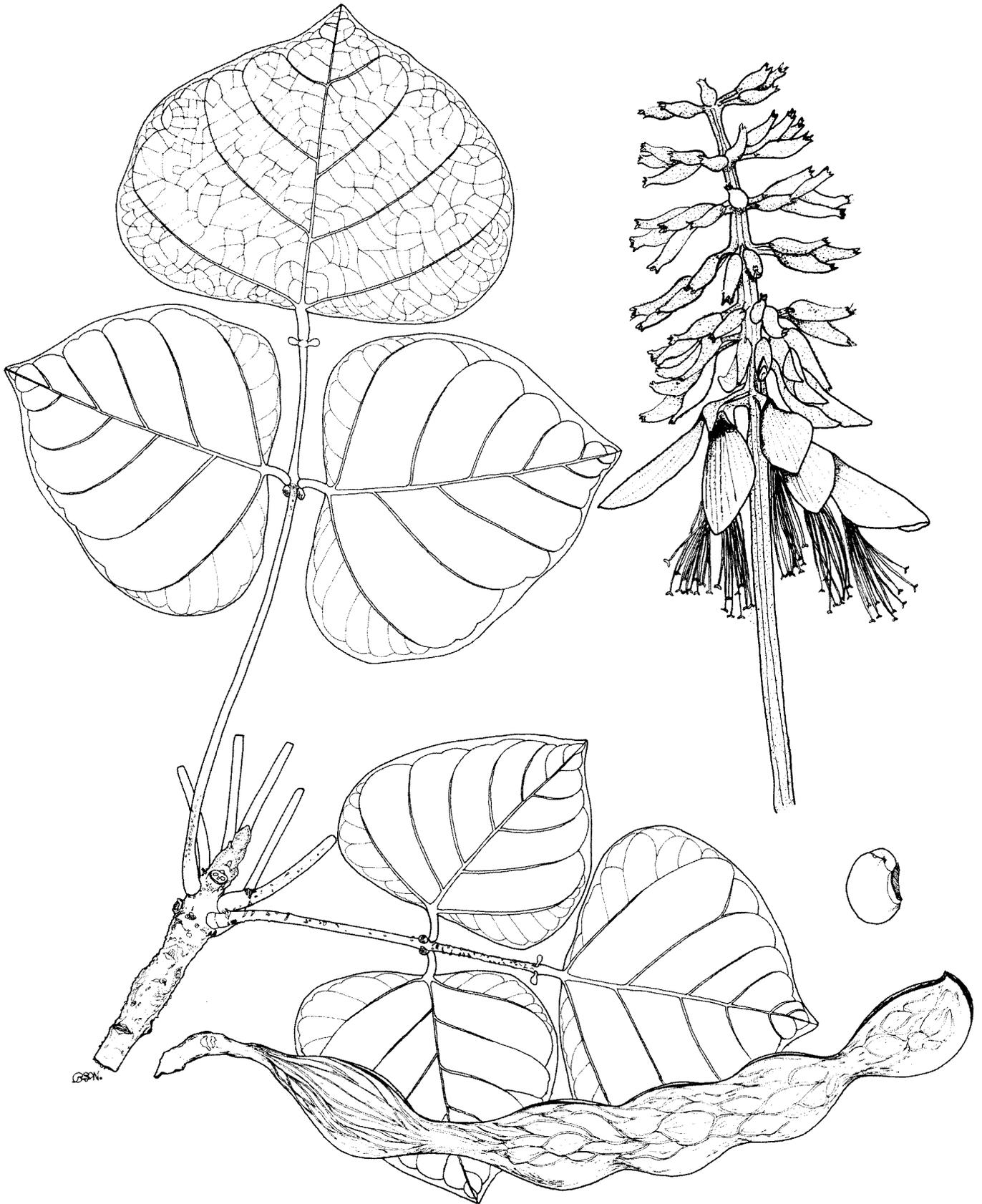
Other common names

tigers-claw, variegated coralbean, variegated coraltree, Indian coraltree, Indian wiliwili; gabgab (Guam); gaugau (N. Marianas); roro (Palau); par (Yap); par (Truk); pahr (Pohnpei); gatae (Am. Samoa)

Botanical synonym

Erythrina indica Lam.

The common name tigers-claw is said to refer to the flower buds. One form has variegated leaves, with yellowish midveins and leafstalks.



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Leafy twig, flower cluster (upper right), pod (below), and seed (lower right), $\frac{2}{3}$ X.