

Tree-heliotrope

Tournefortia argentea L. f.

Borage family (Boraginaceae)

Post-Cook introduction

This distinctive small umbrella-shaped evergreen tree with very short trunk, low widely forking branches, and very broad rounded spreading crown of gray green foliage, was introduced on sandy shores. To 20 ft (6 m), with trunk to 1 ft (0.3 m) in diameter and crown to 40 ft (12 m) across, often flowering as a low shrub. Bark light brown or gray, rough, very thick, deeply furrowed into narrow oblong plates and ridges. Outer bark streaky blackish brown, inner bark light brown, fibrous, tasteless. Twigs stout, finely hairy, gray green, becoming brown, with raised half-round leaf scars and buds of small overlapping leaves.

Leaves alternate, crowded near ends of twigs, gray green, covered with tiny pressed hairs, with short stout leafstalk about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (1 cm) long. Blades narrowly elliptical or obovate, 3–7 inches (7.5–18 cm) long, 1–2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (2.5–6 cm) wide, thick and slightly succulent, rounded at apex, widest beyond middle, tapering to long-pointed base, not toothed, with few side veins, dull gray green on both surfaces.

Flower clusters (cymes) terminal, 6–8 inches (15 cm) long including long stalk, the many branches curved to one side. Flowers many, crowded, stalkless, erect on horizontal curved or coiled branches, bell-shaped, less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) long and broad, composed of five rounded hairy gray green sepals, white corolla with short hairy tube and five spreading rounded lobes, five tiny stamens in notches of corolla, and pistil with conical ovary and slightly two-lobed stigma.

Fruit rounded, flattened, about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) in diameter, smooth and shiny, green, slightly watery, containing two or four large half-round brown nutlets $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) long, embedded in a corky or spongy mass.

It is reported that in India the leaves are eaten raw. They have a slightly salty flavor and might serve in salads or cooked as greens. The corky mass of nutlets may be carried by ocean currents.

Ornamental tree planted and hardy along sandy beaches. Scattered on shores through the Hawaiian Islands. Listed by Hillebrand as in cultivation, apparently before his departure in 1871.

Special area

Waimea Arboretum

Champion

Height 32 ft (9.8 m), c.b.h. 31.5 ft (9.6 m), spread 46 ft (14.0 m). Puako Kawaihae, Hawaii (1968).

Range

Native from India in tropical Asia to Mauritius, Malaya, tropical Australia, western Indian Ocean islands, Polynesia, and Micronesia

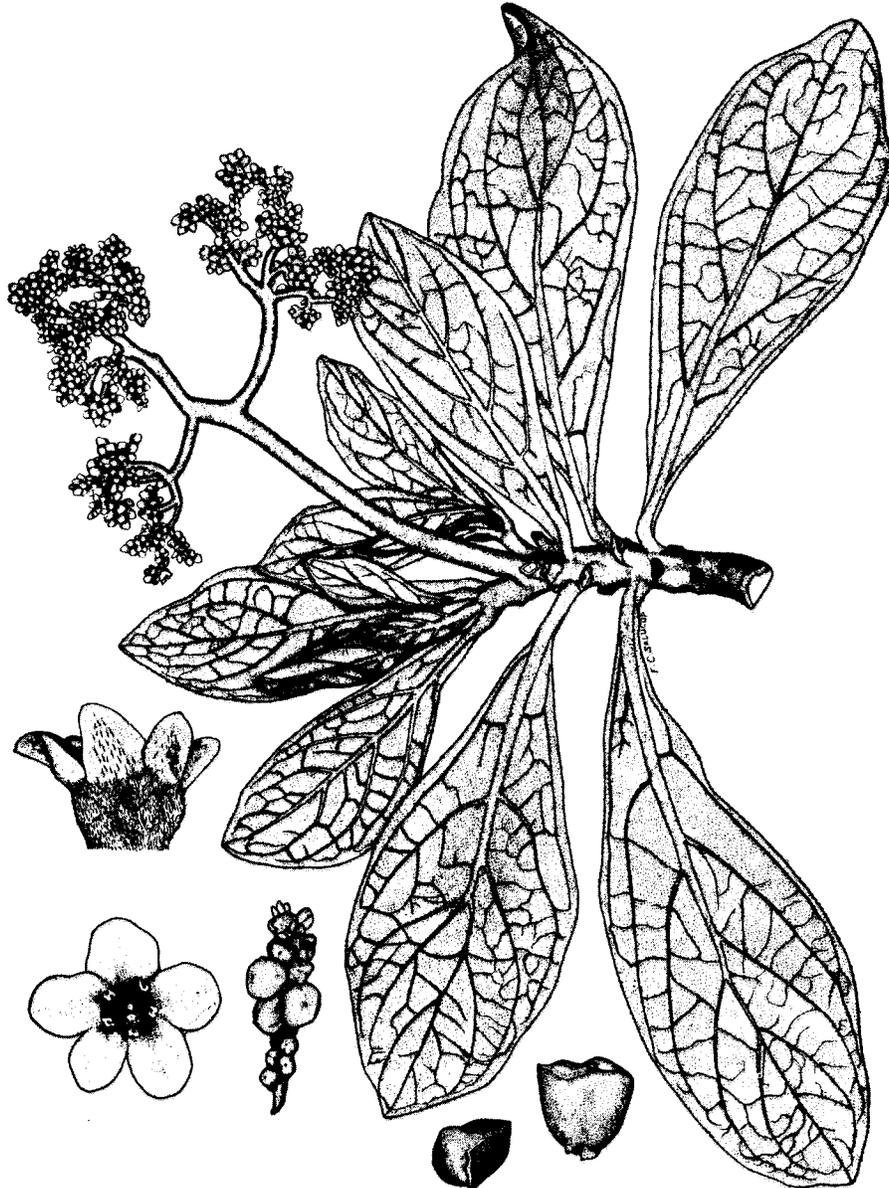
Other common names

velvetleaf; hunig (Guam); huni (N. Marianas); aseri (Palau); chel (Yap); chen yamolehat (Truk); titin (Pohnpei); srusun (Kosrae); kiden (Marshalls); tausuni (Am. Samoa)

Botanical synonym

Messerschmidia argentea (L. f.) 1. M. Johnst.

The genus honors Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708), French botanist who established the genus concept.



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Flowering twig, ½ X; flowers, 4 X, and fruits, 1 X (lower left);
nutlets (below), 4 X (Degener).