Morphological description

*Cleome arabica* is a herbaceous, sticky plant with a strong, foul smell and an unpleasant taste. It easily grows to over 50 cm. in a rainy year. Its stems are rigid, erect and branched and bear alternate trifoliolate leaves. The flowers are small, in leafy bunches. The calyx has 5 lobes. The corolla is formed of 4 unequal yellowish petals that are edged with deep purple or entirely purple-black. The androecium is made up of 6 stamens and the ovary is on a short podogyna. The fruit is dry and dehiscent, formed of long, hanging silique-shaped capsules that enclose hairy seeds whose hair length differentiates the two subspecies in Tunisia: the subsp. *arabica* Ozenda with its woolly long-haired seeds of equal diameter set in silique that taper towards the tip the subsp. *amblyocarpa* (Barr. et Murb.) Ozenda, which differs from the other by having seeds that are covered with very short hairs no more than 1/3 their diameter and silique that are rounded at the tip. Only the second subspecies is found in Tunisia, and it is probably synonymous with *Cleome amblyocarpa* Barr. et Murb. Indeed, Greuter et al. (1986) see *Cleome arabica* L. as a non-Tunisian species. The species of this genus that develop in Tunisia are rather *Cleome amblyocarpa* Barratte and Murb.

Geographical distribution

Local: Very common in the south; also found in the Kerkennah Islands and Djerba.
Regional: North Africa.
Global: From Morocco to Arabia.

Ecology

*Cleome amblyocarpa* is abundant in sandy environments, and the gravel and stony ground of the desert regions and arid steppes.

Status, conservation, culture

Not cultivated; picked for use.

Part used

The leaves.

Traditional medicine

Used as a bechic and a sedative. Also used mixed with *Juniperus phoenicia* to ease pain, *Hammada scoparium* for headaches, and *Artemisia herba alba* for nausea, gastralgia, vomiting and colic.

Toxicity

It is a toxic plant that causes nervous disorders in animals.
References