



## *The Herb Society of America* Promising Plants Profiles

---

### ***Calotropis procera***

syn. *Asclepias procera*

**Genus:** *Calotropis*

**Specific Epithet:** *procera*

**Common Names:** giant milkweed, Sodom apple

**Family:** Asclepiadaceae

**Flower Color:** white to pink with purple tips

**Form:** evergreen perennial shrub

**Hardiness Zone:** 10 and south

**Height:** 10'

**Soil:** well-drained (drought tolerant)

**Sun:** full sun

**Uses:** medicinal, economic, ornamental



Originally from warm parts of Africa and Asia, this is now pantropical and in ecological terms is regarded as an indicator of overgrazed land. I have seen it growing extensively in Oman (Arabia), being one of the few plants that goats and camels won't eat, and also in Antigua, in habitats degraded first by sugar cane cultivation and now by cattle and goats.

There are no doubt many other places in the world where giant milkweed abounds. It may be common and widespread but it is a magnificent shrub, reaching 10 feet tall, with large silver-green leaves, clusters of waxy purple-tipped flowers, and inflated pale green seed pods. The pods split open when ripe to release silk-tufted seed to the wind. The latex is poisonous, containing digitalis-like compounds that affect the heart, and is used to make arrow poison. Medicinally, the acrid sap latex is used to treat boils, infected wounds and other skin problems in people, and to treat parasitic skin infestations in animals. It also yields ash for making gunpowder, and extremely strong fiber. I have a young plant grown from seed collected in Oman. It's frustratingly slow! In warm parts of the U.S. it would grow outside, but it might be worth checking first to see if it is classed as an invasive species before doing so. – Deni Bown, Promising Plants Presentation, 2003

Photo by Deni Bown

Text and images © 2003 The Herb Society of America