

CORIARIACEAE

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A family of warm temperate areas with disjunct distribution in parts of the Mediterranean, Pakistan to Japan, New Guinea, New Zealand, and Mexico to southern South America, containing a single genus with ~15 species of trees or shrubs, of which a single species is a scrambling shrub or vine, with disjunct distribution from Mexico south through Central America, Colombia to Peru, Chile and Argentina, a pioneer species in secondary plant formations between 900–3,600 m elevations.

Diagnosics: Scrambling vines that have quadrangular stems, with opposite short lateral branches bearing opposite, distichous, nearly sessile, simple leaves, and inflorescence of long axillary racemes.

General Characters

1. STEMS. Weak quadrangular, with scanty secondary growth, reaching 2–5 m in length and ~1 cm wide at base; cross sections with large medulla and xylem dissected by numerous wide rays.
2. EXUDATES. No visible exudate.
3. CLIMBING MECHANISMS. Scrambling vines, with short, opposite lateral branches.
4. LEAVES. Opposite, chartaceous to subcoriaceous, simple, entire, elliptic, with 3 main veins from base; petioles very short, glandless; stipules minute, caducous.
5. INFLORESCENCE. Long, axillary racemes.
6. PEDICELS. Longer than the perianth.
7. FLOWERS. Bisexual, actinomorphic; calyx of 5 free, imbricate sepals; petals 5, shorter than the sepals, becoming fleshy and persistent in fruit; stamens 10, the filaments free;

ovary superior, carpels 5–10, distinct but fused at the base, styles as numerous as carpels, with stigmatic surface on distal portion.

8. FRUIT. Achenes, free, 5, covered by the persistent purplish, fleshy petals.

CORIARIA Linnaeus, Sp. Pl. 1037. 1753.

Erect or scandent shrubs. Stems with scanty secondary growth reaching ~1 cm wide, and up to 15 m in length; cross section quadrangular, with regular anatomy, large medulla, xylem



Coriaria ruscifolia, photo by Dick Culbert.

dissected by numerous, wide rays; bark is relatively smooth, with numerous small, lenticels. Leaves opposite, simple, distichous; petioles very short. Inflorescences of axillary racemes or terminal on short lateral branches, commonly with reddish axis; bracts minute,

persistent. Calyx of 5 free sepals; corolla of 5 petals, persistent and becoming fleshy in fruit; stamens 5; carpels 5, nearly free. Fruits of 5 achenes per flower, covered by the persistent, fleshy, purple petals.

Distinctive features: Scrambling vine with opposite, nearly sessile leaves and long, hanging axillary racemes.

Distribution: A genus of 15 species, with only one species in the Neotropics which commonly grows as a scrambling vine, distributed from Mexico to Chile with disjunct distribution in secondary plant formations; 900–2,600 m.

