

MARANTACEAE

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A pantropical family of robust herbs with 29 genera and ~550 species. Marantaceae vines in the Neotropics are restricted to the genus *Ischnosiphon* where 8 species out of a total of 36 are scrambling herbs. They are predominantly found in humid forest understory in the Guianas and the Amazonian region in South America.

Diagnosics: Typical monocot morphology but with long cylindrical, slender, fragile stems, distinguished by the pulvinate, petiolate leaves and paired flowers.

General Characters

1. **STEMS.** Stems are cylindrical in cross section, slender, < 1 cm in diam., lower portion with overlapping leaf sheaths.
2. **CLIMBING MECHANISM.** Scrambling herbs.
3. **LEAVES.** Simple, alternate, distichous; blades elliptic, or oblong-lanceolate, commonly asymmetrical at base and apex; venation finely pinnate; petioles short, stout.
4. **INFLORESCENCES.** Axillary, ascending, short, cylindrical, spicate, with two flowers per node; bracts persistent, covering the base of flowers.
5. **FLOWERS.** Zygomorphic, bisexual; sepals 3, free; petals connate at base forming a tube with the staminodes and the style; stamen 1; staminodes 2, petaloid; ovary inferior, trilocular, but only one locule fertile, with a single ovule.
6. **FRUITS.** A narrow-ellipsoid capsule with a single seed.

USES

Stems of *Ischnosiphon gracilis* (Rudge) Koern. are used for basketry weaving by the Kaiabi tribe of the Xingu Indigenous Reserve located in the southern portion of the Brazilian Amazon (de Athayde et al. 2006). The Ticunas from the Peruvian Amazon used the stems of various species of *Ischnosiphon* for the confection of various utilitarian items such as a cassava press (*tipitís*), sifters, and baskets (Brañas et al. 2016).

ISCHNOSIPHON Koernicke, Nouv. Mém. Soc. Imp. Naturalistes Moscou 11: 346. 1859.

Robust, rhizomatous herbs, much-branched at base, some species scrambling vines; stems



Ischnosiphon gracilis, photo by P. Acevedo.

cylindrical, slender, commonly rigid, reaching 8 m in length, ascending and later hanging, with verticels of short, ascending branches. Leaves cauline, alternate, distichous, the blades 15–35 cm long, chartaceous, with finely,

non-prominent, pinnate venation; petioles pulvinate with an elongated sheath at base.

Inflorescences axillary or terminal on short lateral branches. Flowers zygomorphic, bisexual; sepals 3, free, often pinkish-yellowish; petals connate at base forming a tube with the staminodes and style; stamen 1; staminodes 2 petaloid; ovary inferior, trilocular, but only one locule fertile, with a single ovule. Fruit a small, narrowly ellipsoid, 1-seeded capsule.

Distinctive features: Culms are slender, smooth, scrambling and later hanging down; flowers small, in pairs at the inflorescence nodes.

Distribution: A neotropical genus of 36 species distributed from Nicaragua south to southern Brazil; eight species with climbing habit distributed in wet forests in the Guianas and the Amazon basin.