

PHYTOLACCACEAE

P. Acevedo-Rodríguez

A tropical and warm temperate family with most species in the Americas. The family consists of four genera and 30 species of herbs, shrubs, lianas or less often trees or epiphytes, Lianas are restricted to the genus *Ercilla* with 2 species in Chile, and to *Agdestis* with a single species in the Neotropics distributed in Mexico, Central America and Cuba; found in dry to moist forests between 30–1,200 m elevations.

Diagnosics: Twining vines, leaves alternate, simple, with strong garlic-fetid smell.

General Characters

1. STEMS. Subcylindrical, herbaceous, reaching 3–15 m in length and ~1 cm in diam.; cross sections with successive cambia that produce discontinuous concentric arcs of xylem and phloem (Figure 198B).
2. EXUDATES. No visible exudate.
3. CLIMBING MECHANISMS. *Agdestis* is a twining vine.
4. LEAVES. Alternate, chartaceous, simple, crenulate, nearly cordiform, exstipulate; petioles as long as the blade, glandless.
5. INFLORESCENCE. Axillary racemiform or paniculate thyrses.
6. PEDICELS. Elongated.
7. FLOWERS. Bisexual, zygomorphic; calyx of 4 free, petaloid sepals; corolla absent; stamens 13–20, the filaments free; ovary partly inferior, 4-locular, with a single basal ovule per locule, the style short, stout, with 4, divaricate to reflexed stigmatic branches.
8. FRUIT. Coriaceous, indehiscent, with persistent spreading sepals at the base.

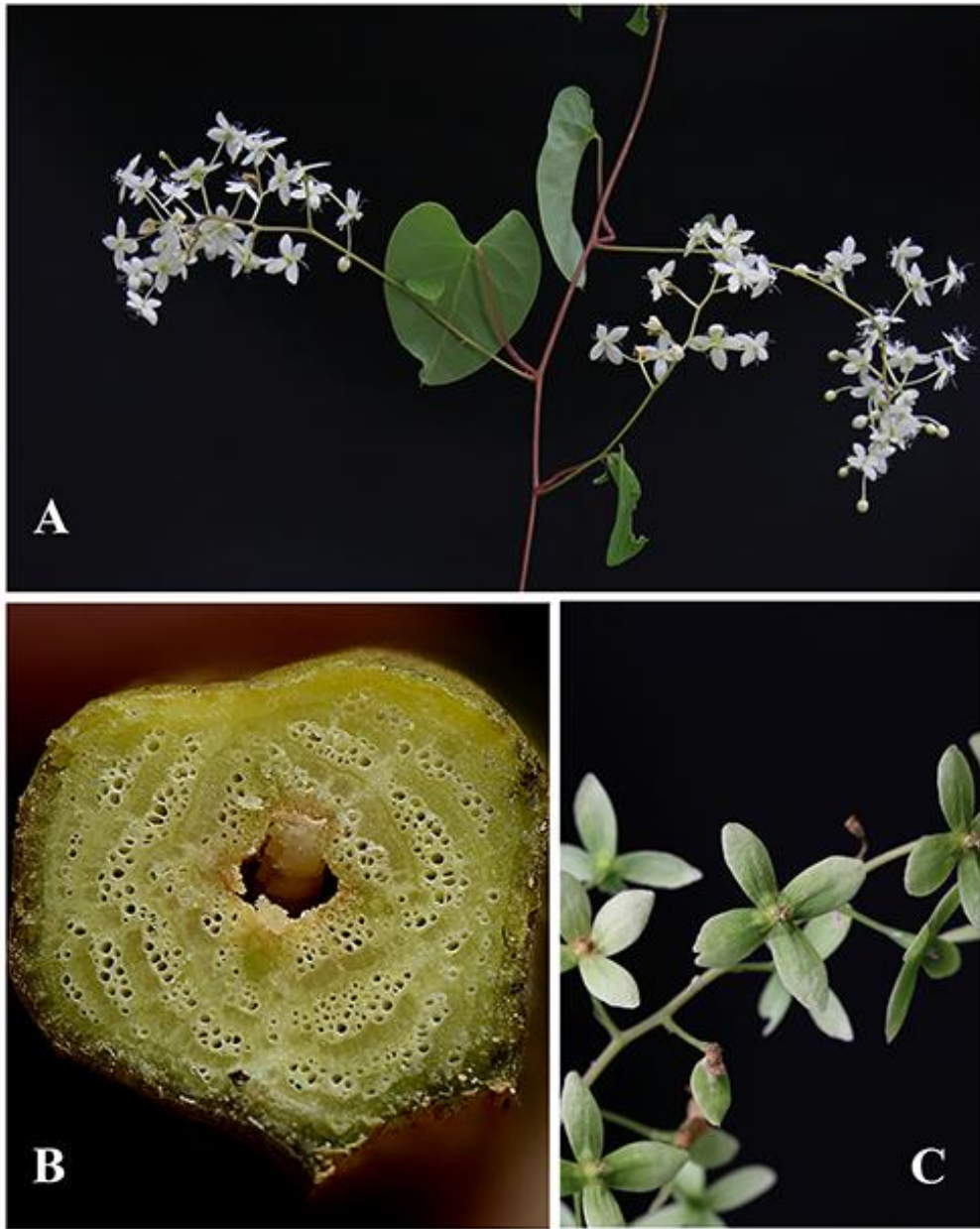


Figure 198. *Agdestis clematidea*. **A.** Branch with axillary inflorescences. **B.** Stem cross section. **C.** Young fruits with persistent sepals. Photos: A, C by J. Amith; B by P. Acevedo.

AGDESTIS Moçño & Sessé ex de Candolle, Syst. Nat. 1: 511, 543. 1817 ['1818'].

Twining vine, herbaceous, reaching 15 m in length. Stems angular, reddish, striate, puberulent. Leaves with a strong, disagreeable odor, alternate, chartaceous, ovate or broadly ovate, 3–9 × 3–7.5 cm, the apex obtuse or short-acuminate, mucronate, the base deeply

cordiform or hastate, the margins crenulate; upper surface dark green, dull, with minute dots; lower surface light green, dull, puberulent, with prominent venation; petioles 1.5–9 cm long, with a reddish tinge, sulcate; stipules absent. Flowers bisexual, white, in axillary racemose or paniculate thyrses, 6–17 cm long; peduncles glabrous or puberulent; pedicels 1–2 mm long. Sepals 4, white, 3–5 mm long, free, oblong or oblanceolate, spreading; corolla absent; stamens 13–20; ovary partially inferior, the style conical, with 4 recurved or spreading stigmatic branches. Fruits coriaceous, indehiscent, turbinate, ~3 mm long, with the sepals turning green and persistent at the base. Seeds elliptical.

Distinctive features: Twining vine with alternate, cordiform leaves and strong garlic-fetid smell; stems reddish tinged.

Distribution: A single species, naturally distributed from Mexico south to Nicaragua, occasionally cultivated in the Antilles and South America.