

Quisqualis indica L.

Rangoon Creeper

Other Common Names: Akar-Dani, Drunken Sailor, Irangan-Malli, Udani.

Family: *Combretaceae*.

Cold Hardiness: Shoots are cold hardy only in the tropics, USDA zones 10 and 11, and are injured by the lightest frost, but the roots are more cold hardy with plants returning as herbaceous perennials in zone 9 (8b).

Foliage: Evergreen; opposite; simple; elliptic to oblong-elliptic; 5 to 6 (7) long by 2 to 2½ wide; tip acuminate; margins entire to slightly undulate; base rounded; pinnately veined; covered in small translucent white to brownish hairs both above and beneath; medium to dark glossy green in color; ¾ to 1½ (2) petioles which become persistent and become thorny aiding in climbing; the crushed foliage has a scent somewhere between that of crushed peas (*Pisum sativum*) and the unpleasant odor of Tree-Of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*).

Flower: Terminal short spikes or panicles of pendent flowers with long, 3 to 4, calyx and corolla tubes; calyx green with 1/16 long lobes; corolla showy with five lobes flaring 1½ to 2 across; petals begin white or light pink and turn a dark pink to red as they mature; throat light green; mildly fragrant with pungent undertones; the fragrance is strongest at night; the flowers are a very noticeable feature.

Fruit: Small dry drupe-like seed, 1 to 1⅓ long, with five angles and five wings; not ornamental.

Stem / Bark: Stems — medium thickness; arching and stiff; covered in small translucent white to brown hairs; bright to medium green in color, turning tan-brown as they mature; small stubs of woody xylem tissue remain on the stems if leaves are broken off; Buds — tiny; 1/16 long or less; hairy pubescent; initially green turning light to medium brown at maturity; Bark — gray-brown to tan-brown.

Habit: Somewhat shrubby in youth from a seed becoming a climbing vine as it ages or from the beginning with cutting propagated stock; the stiff limbs sort of arch up and lay on things until the leaves drop and the thorny petiole remnants help the plant to anchor itself to structures or other plants; plants can reach heights of 20 to 30 in tropical climates; plants can be trained as to a mounding shrub-like form when grown in the open; the overall texture is moderately coarse.

Cultural Requirements: Survives in a wide range of soil and moisture regimes; avoid poorly drained sites or those that are permanently droughty; best growth is with regular supplies of moisture; full sun to afternoon shade; pH adaptable; avoid overly fertile sites or high nitrogen fertilization as foliage predominates over flowers under these conditions; propagate from cuttings to avoid juvenile phase; not particularly salt tolerant.

Pathological Problems: Various scales and caterpillars can be occasional pests.

Ornamental Assets: Lush rapidly growing lustrous green foliage with pendent clusters of pink or red flowers throughout much of the growing season; nighttime fragrance.

Limitations & Liabilities: Rangoon Creeper can be vigorous to a fault on fertile sites; plants seldom tend to be as floriferous in regions where the plants dieback as in truly tropical regions where they can be spectacular in bloom.

Landscape Utilization: Dieback herbaceous perennial vine for short structures; large patio container or conservatory plants; in tropical and subtropical regions where the shoots are hardy, they work well on arbors, trellises, pillars, arches, and pergolas or as an espalier.

Other Comments: The genus name *Quisqualis* derives from the Latin words for who and what kind pointing to the original uncertainty either in what family to place the genus or whether it was a shrub

or a vine; the specific epithet refers to India, one of the species' countries of origin; when *Q. indica* are grown from seed, they tend to be shrubby at first, then develop a vining habit, just opposite in sequence from most vine species with mature to juvenile phase changes such as *Hedera helix* or *Ficus pumila* that are first vines, then shrubby at sexual maturity; Rangoon Creeper is reported to be **poisonous** by some authorities; Friend (1942) was recommending it for the lower Rio Grande Valley over sixty years ago.

Native Habitat: Old world tropics.

Related Taxa: The genus *Quisqualis* L. contains from five to seventeen species, depending upon the authority, of which only *Q. indica* is widely cultivated in this country as an ornamental; selection for darker red colors might be warranted; a double-flowered form is reported.

References: Broschat and Meerow, 1999; Burras, 1994; Friend, 1942; Howard, 1959; Rauch and Weissich, 2000; Riffle, 1998; Watkins and Sheehan, 1975; Whistler, 2000; Williams, 1998.

Copyrighted 2002 with all rights reserved by Michael A. Arnold for future inclusion in *Landscape Plants For Texas And Environs, Third Edition*.