

Echium candicans

Pride of Madeira



Pride of Madeira (*Echium candicans*) is native only to the island of Madeira which lies in the Atlantic, southwest of Portugal. However, its billowing rosettes of soft green leaves and dramatic spikes of blue-purple flowers, together with its drought tolerance have made it a landscaping favorite worldwide, including coastal California. Unfortunately, it occasionally escapes gardens and moves into wildlands where it eliminates the native plants that support our native birds and mammals. In the Reserve, a wall of pride of Madeira is slowly advancing down a slope above the Rios trail, overpowering the invincible lemonade berry.

Ironically, the native population on Madeira is threatened by the same types of human activities that threaten the native plants in California. In 2008 a large wildfire swept through the central population of pride of Madeira and a population survey has not been conducted since; as of 2013, the effect of the fire, indeed the survival of the main population was unknown.



Human Uses

Many species in the borage family have high levels of GLA (gamma-linolenic acid) in their seeds; reportedly this includes pride of Madeira.²⁰⁸ GLA is one of the omega-6 fatty acids, which in small amounts, are essential for human growth and development but which must be obtained through food. Research has indicated that omega-6 fatty acids help to fight inflammation related to a variety of ailments.²¹³ GLA as “Borage Oil” is readily available as a health supplement, but the species of borage is not usually identified, so the role of pride-of-Madeira is uncertain. We found one reference²⁰⁸ to the use

of pride of Madeira in herbal medicine; an infusion of leaves is used for headaches, fevers, and coughs.

However, we do not advise nibbling on the seeds or the leaves of pride of Madeira. According to the California Poison Control System,²⁰⁹ all parts of the plant are considered poisonous and ingestion may cause serious effects to heart, liver, kidneys or brain. If that is not enough, the stiff hairs on the foliage may make you itch.



Interesting Facts

The root of the genus name, *Echium*, comes from the ancient Greek word *echis* meaning “viper”. Some think this refers to the fact that the seed resembles a viper’s head others suggest it comes from an old belief that a related plant (*E. vulgare*) was a remedy for the adder’s bite.

Pride of Madeira is a spectacular landscape plant. It received the Royal Horticultural Society’s Award of Garden Merit in 2002, and has been widely introduced to Mediterranean climate gardens.

Unfortunately, the Pride of Madeira is considered threatened in its native range. It is native only to high altitude rocky cliffs and terraces on the small island of Madeira where it occupies less than 150 square miles (362 km²). It is reported to be threatened by removal by plant collectors, development of roads and communication networks, recreational activities and natural disasters (threats which impact many of our native species). In 2010 a “major fire rage” burned through its main habitat. In 2013, the Pride of Madeira was evaluated for the IUCN Red list of threatened species but was not given a threat category because fieldwork to determine the survival of the main population after the fire was lacking. How sad if the population is more secure in the gardens of coastal California than its natural habitat.

