

LYTHRACEAE

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A tropical and subtropical family extending into temperate zones, containing herbs, shrubs and trees, with 27 genera and ~650 species, not commonly associate with lianas. However, two neotropical species of *Cuphea*, i.e., *C. paradoxa* Koehne and *C. pinetorum* Benth. are frequently collected as scrambling herbs or vines. Since Lythraceae is a morphologically diverse family no attempt will be made here to provide a description of the family, instead, the current treatment is solely based on the description of climbing species of *Cuphea*.

General Characters

1. STEMS. Herbaceous to subwoody, often with 4 or 5 prominent angles, reaching 2–10 m in length; cross section with regular anatomy forming a continuous vascular cylinder traversed by uniseriate or biseriate rays (sometimes inconspicuous). The presence of intraxylary phloem is common to all members of the family (Metcalf & Chalk 1957).
2. EXUDATES. No visible exudate.
3. CLIMBING MECHANISM. Scramblers, leaning upon the surrounding vegetation and reaching up to 10 m in length.
4. LEAVES. Opposite, decussate, simple, chartaceous, with entire margins and pinnate venation; petioles are short or absent; stipules inconspicuous.
5. INFLORESCENCES. Axillary, 1–3-flowered racemes, or flowers solitary in upper nodes.
6. FLOWERS. Zygomorphic, 6-merous, bisexual, shortly pedicellate; calyx tubular, 12-ribbed, with short lobes and sometimes appendages on distal portion; corolla of free petals, the 2 dorsal petals usually larger than the 2 or 4 ventral ones; stamens included or exerted,

inserted on the floral tube, filaments unequal; ovary superior, asymmetrical, 2-carpellate, unilocular, with few to numerous ovules, style terminal, short, included, stigma capitate.

7. FRUITS. A thin-walled capsule.
8. SEEDS. Few to many, dorsiventrally flattened.

CUPHEA Jacquin, Enum. Syst. Pl. 4, 21. 1760.

Erect, herbs, subshrubs or shrubs, scrambling vines or decumbent herbs. Scrambling



Cuphea pinetorum, photo by P. Acevedo.

vines 2–10 m long. Stems nearly terete or 4–5-angled. Leaves opposite, decussate, pinnately veined, with entire margins, sessile or shortly petioled. Inflorescence of short, axillary 1–3-flowered racemes, or flowers solitary in upper nodes. Flowers zygomorphic, 6-merous; calyx tubular, often gibbous, deep pink, red, purplish or rarely green, 12-ribbed, the lobes short; petals bright red, 6, the 2 dorsal petals larger than the ventral ones, or sometimes vestigial; stamens commonly 11, and exserted; ovary superior, sessile, asymmetric. Fruit a unilocular, thin-walled capsule, covered by the persistent,

ribbed calyx.

Distinctive features: Scrambling, herbaceous or subwoody vines, with opposite leaves, flowers brightly colored.

Distribution: A New World genus ~260 species, of erect herbs or shrubs. Only *C. paradoxa* from Colombia and Venezuela and *C. pinetorum* from Mexico to Honduras are consistently reported as scrambling vines; open disturbed, moist habitats; 125–2,400 m.

