

## LOCAL VEGETABLES IN CAMEROON: CORCHORUS SPECIES USED AS A VEGETABLE

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An agro-botanical study of local vegetables in Cameroon is in preparation, including the taxonomy, identity, morphology, agronomy and nutritional value of about 70 species. *Corchorus olitorius* L. and other edible species of the genus *Corchorus* L. (Tiliaceae) are part of this study. The wide variation and eventual classification in cultivar-groups of the important vegetable *C. olitorius* is visualised on a poster. An example of a wild edible *Corchorus* species is also presented.

*C. olitorius* is a well-known fibre crop, but types with short and more branched stems are frequently cultivated as a leaf vegetable. Jew's mallow (jute mallow, jute, bush okra, West African sorrel) is grown as vegetable crop throughout the Middle East and in parts of Africa, Malaysia and Latin America. In Cameroon, it is widely cultivated and has become weedy in many places. The leaves are used fresh or dried. They can be stored after drying and used later on during periods of scarcity. The leaves become mucilaginous when cooked, a property highly appreciated.

Authors differ in their opinion as to the origin of the species. Most likely, the primary centre of origin is Africa, and the secondary centre may be India or the Indo-Burma region.

The species *C. aestuans* L., *C. fascicularis* Lam. and *C. tridens* L. are examples of edible greens which are gathered from the wild or collected as "weeds" from the fields. They sometimes seem to occur cultivated.

*C. olitorius* ranks on the list of vegetable species with second priority of the IBPGR. This leaf vegetable seems not yet in great danger of genetic erosion, but collection is recommended and selection of cultivars should rate a high priority. Therefore, the National Horticultural Research Institute, Ibadan, Nigeria (NIHORT) is currently active in collecting material and in the conservation of germplasm.

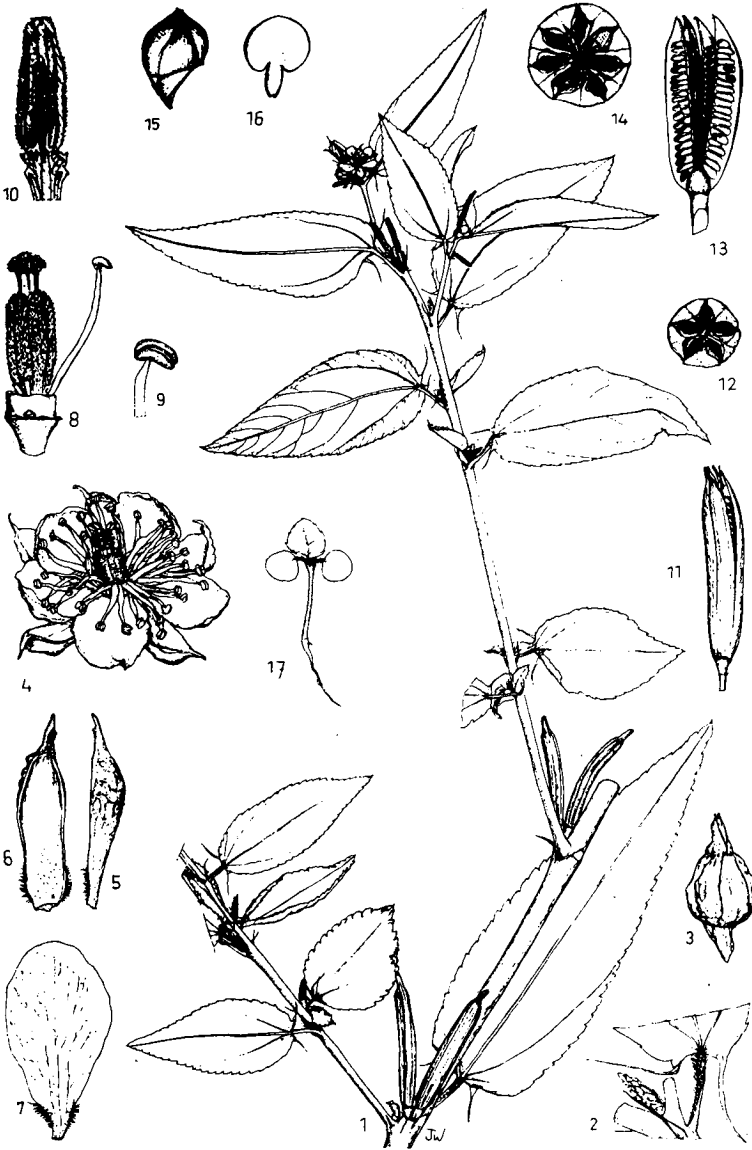
There are numerous local types varying among others in height, stem colour, pubescence, leaf- and fruitshape and leaf production. Based on material from Cameroon, and other West African countries as well, I propose to classify the vegetable *C. olitorius* in three cultivar-groups: cv.-group *Olitorius*, cv.-group *Incisifolius* and cv.-group *Géant de Bertoua*. These can be readily distinguished by their leaf shape, but other characteristics are involved too.  
cv.-group *Olitorius*: leaf blade narrowly ovate to ovate, 4-13 x 2-5 cm, margin serrate to serrate-crenate.

cv.-group *Incisifolius*: leaf blade ovate to broadly ovate in outline, 4-7 x 2-5 cm, 3-7 lobed or laciniate, margin deeply and coarsely serrate.

cv.-group *Géant de Bertoua*: leaf blade ovate to broadly ovate, 9-16 x 6-13 cm, margin broadly crenate, crenatures often apiculate.



*Corchorus olitorius* L. cv.-group *Olitorius*  
in mixed intercropping.



*Corchorus olitorius* L. cv.-group *Olitorius*:  
 1. habit (x 2/3); 2. leaf base + stipules (x 2); 3. flower bud  
 (x 4); 4 - 10. flower with details (4 : x 4; 5 - 8, 10 : x 6; 9 : x 12);  
 11 - 14. fruit with details (11, 13 : x 1; 12, 14 : x 2); 15. seed  
 (x 6); 16. embryo (x 6); 17. seedling (x 2/3).