

Red Hottentot-Fig, *hay alam*

GENERAL

Origin	: Mediterranean
Vigour	: fast growing
Humidity	: very arid, semi-arid, semi-humid
Propagation	: sowing and pricking out, cuttings
Maintenance	: moderate

CONDITIONS

Urban climate	: resistant
Dessication	: resistant
Stagnant water	: vulnerable
Irrigation	: low
Salinity/ppm	: very high (8000 ppm)
Hardiness	: 0°C

SHAPE

Type	: sub-shrub
Height	: 0.15 m
Spread	: 2 m
Foliage	: evergreen

FLOWER

Colour	: pink, lilac, light yellow
Size	: 10 cm - 15 cm
Period	: March - June

FRUIT

Type of fruit	: capsule
Fruit size	: 2 cm

The Red Hottentot Fig, or hay alam in Arabic, originates in South Africa, but is now naturalised in regions with a Mediterranean climate, where it may become invasive. It withstands coastal conditions such as high winds and salinity. Not always successful in Arriyadh, *C. acinaciformis* suffers frost damage during cold winters and often dieback, requiring replanting from time to time. Shoots form mats of upright, succulent leaves. The foliage is sharply angled. It is fresh green when young, turning dull green later on, and may become red with age. The pink or magenta, daisy-like flowers, 15 cm in diameter, are highly ornamental. The flowering climax is late spring to early summer, but intermediate flowers may appear all year round. A large number of seeds develop in sweet, sticky fruits that ripen from August to September when they turn yellow and emit a sweet scent. Soil should be well drained. Watering should be moderate during warm weather. In winter, irrigation should be just enough to keep the plants from withering. If conditions are suitable, the shoots keep growing without dormancy up to one metre per year. They should be protected against frost, and overwatering may also result in loss of the plant, owing to fungus disease causing stem rot. The Red Hottentot Fig does well in erosion control planting, as a groundcover in rock gardens and in all areas with low maintenance, although bare patches require replanting with cuttings. Roots may be aggressive, competing for water with shrubs and trees in the same area.

