

***Globularia alypum* L.**
Globulariaceae



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■ **Morphological description**

This is a perennial under-shrub with erect bushy branches, about 30 to 60 cm. high. The leaves have a bitter aromatic scent and are sparse, evergreen, simple, alternate, without stipules, with a short petiole, tough, and with a glabrous limb that is entire or tridentate at the tip.

The flowers are sweet-scented, irregular, packed together in a dense capitulum enclosed by an involucre of oval, overlapping bracts. The corolla is a purplish blue; it is bilabiate, but the upper lip is almost non-existent and the lower lip very long. There are four didynamous stamens. The ovary is free with a single loculus and a single ovule. The fruit is dry and enclosed in the calyx. Flowering and fructification take place from March to July.

In Tunisia's flora, two sub-species are mentioned: the sub-species eu-alypum L. is characterised by 15 mm.-wide capitula, bracts and only slightly hairy calyxes, and the sub-species arabica (Jaub. et Spach.) Maire = *Globularia eriocephala* Pomel = *G. vesceritensis* Batt. is characterised by terminal capitula that can be 20 mm. in diameter, and very downy, woolly, whitish bracts and calyxes.

A revision of the naming of Mediterranean species

***Globularia alypum* L.** Sp. Pl. 95. 1753

Arabic: Zrîga

French: Globulaire, séné arabe, turbith, séné de Provence

of the *Globularia* genus (Greuter et al., 1986) mentions an aggregate that bears the name *Globularia alypum* aggr. and includes only two species:

- *Globularia alypum* L. Sp. Pl.: 95. 1753
- *Globularia arabica* Jaub. et Spach. III: Pl. Orient. 3: 76. 1848 = *Globularia alypum* subsp. arabica (Jaub. et Spach.) Quezel et Santa, Nouv. Fl. Algérie: 860. 1963; = *Globularia eriocephala* Pomel in Bull. Soc. Sc. Phys. Algérie 11: 111. 1874.

■ **Geographical distribution**

Local: Very common in the whole of Tunisia.

Regional: All of Tunisia, North Africa.

Global: *Globularia alypum* L. is found in southern Europe and in North Africa from Morocco to Fezzan, in altitude in north Tibesti, in the Saharan Atlas and in the Hoggar. The sub-species eu-alypum L. is mentioned in the Mediterranean, whereas the sub-species arabica (Jaub. et Spach.) is only mentioned in Algeria, Morocco and the Hoggar.

■ **Ecology**

Globularia alypum L. is known almost throughout Tunisia, from the sub-humid to the arid, but is rare in the Saharan area. It characterises the forest degradation stages and develops on stony soils.

■ **Status, conservation, culture**

The plant is widely distributed around Tunisia. It is much sought after for its therapeutic virtues and is thus subject to frequent, unsupervised picking. Its stems and leaves are dried and sold by herbalists and sellers of medicinal plants in the local souks of the region.

■ **Part used**

The leaves.

■ Constituents

A resin, iridoids (aucubosid) and sterols.

■ Pharmacological action

It is thought to be a gentle astringent purgative. The plant is said to be anti-leukaemic and anti-carcinogenic as regards the tongue.

■ Traditional medicine

It is basically used for its purgative and diuretic virtues. Indeed, in the Sahara (Doreau, 1961 in Le Floc'h 1983) it is used as a purgative for fever, headache, rheumatism and urinary incontinence. Nomads in the Tunisian south use it (Louis 1979, in Le Floc'h 1983) as a concentrated decoction (leaves and branches) to help cure ulcers, as an infusion for colic, and as a poultice (with honey) to bring abscesses to a head quickly. The poultice is applied to the swelling (Prax 1850, in Le Floc'h 1983). In the El Hamma region near Gabès, the leaves are ground to a powder (Louis 1979, in Le Floc'h 1983), or chewed and then sprinkled or smeared onto a wound to heal it.

The writings of Ben Ali and Louis (1945, in Le Floc'h 1983) mention that it is recommended in the treatment of gout.

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