

Hottentot fig

Scan for more information



Species Description

Scientific name: *Carpobrotus edulis*

AKA: Sour fig, Sally-my-handsome, *Mesembryanthemum*

Native to: South Africa

Habitat: Mild coastal areas, sea cliffs and sand dunes

Hottentot fig is a low, trailing, succulent, mat-forming evergreen perennial, which can grow up to 3m in length and 25cm in height. Leaves are in opposite pairs, united at the base, 3 angled, tapered and slightly curved; they grow 4-12cm long and 1-1.5cm wide. They are dark yellowish-green in colour and turn reddish in autumn and when older. Flowers are daisy-like, large and silky which grow 4.5 – 10cm in diameter. They have numerous petals which are yellow fading to pale pink; pinkish-purple; or pink with yellow bases, the centre is usually yellow and only opens in the afternoon. New roots form at each node giving a dense fibrous shallow root system. The fruit is fleshy, indehiscent and slightly fig-like.

Hottentot fig was introduced Northern Ireland intentionally as it was used to stabilise sand dunes but improper disposal of garden waste may have also contributed to its dispersal. Subsequent spread has been from vegetative propagation by runners rooting at nodes and through seeds, which can be consumed and dispersed by rabbits, rodents and deer.

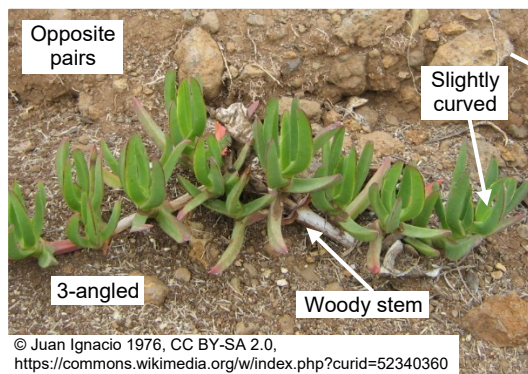
Where established it forms large dense mats, displacing native vegetation. It also alters soil condition, increasing nitrogen and organic content.

Hottentot fig is listed under Schedule 9 of The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and as such, it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.



© Hans Hillewaert, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4006232>

Key ID Features

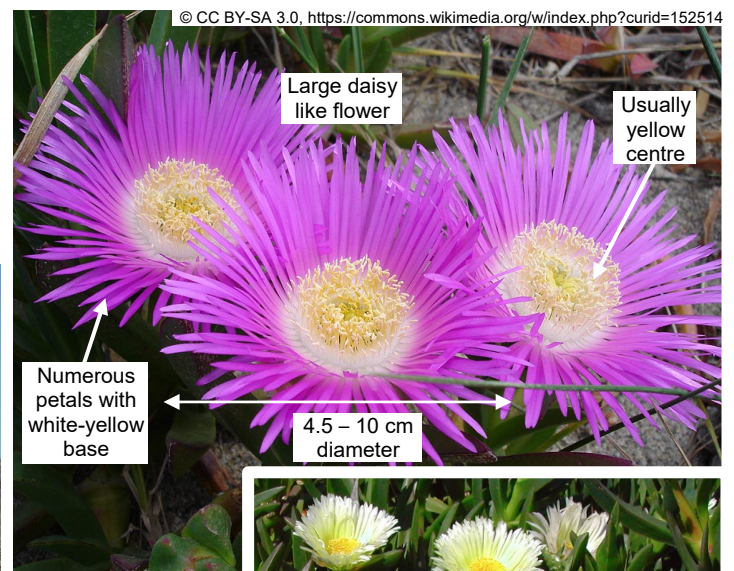


© Juan Ignacio 1976, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52340360>



Was commonly planted for dune stabilisation

© Lubman04, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25018684>



© CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=152514>

Flowers start yellow and fade to pale pink



© Lubman04, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25018683>

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

Evergreen plant, can always be identified from leaves and obvious flowers.

Similar Species

Glasswort

Native
(*Salicornia* spp.)



Fleshy stem

Rounded segments

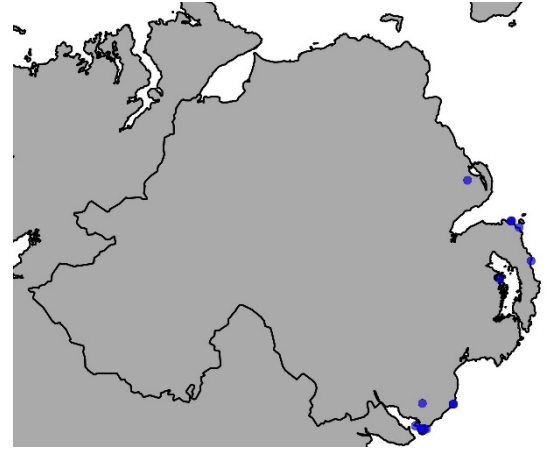
Branches in opposite pairs

© S.Ahmadihayeri, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=31998809>

© Marco Vinicio Olla, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16235233>

Distribution

Present on south and east coast.

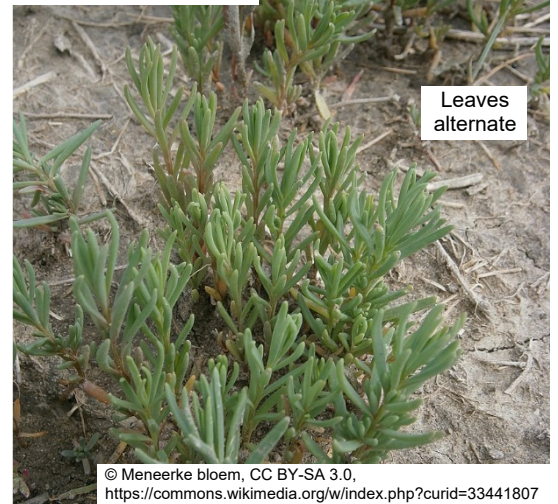


Source NBN atlas Northern Ireland – <https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000456945>

Check website for current distribution

Annual sea-blite

Native
(*Suaeda maritima*)



Leaves alternate

© Meneerke bloem, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33441807>

Purple dewplant and 2 other sea fig species are also invasive non-native plants that are very similar in appearance and can be found in the same habitat as Hottentot fig. None of these 3 species have been recorded in Northern Ireland.

Purple dewplant

Invasive non-native
(*Disphyma crassifolium*)



Flower has fewer petals

Cylindrical leaves, dark green to reddish-green

© Paul Asman and Jill Lenoble, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25253110>

Angular sea fig

Invasive non-native
(*Carpobrotus glaucescens*)



Smaller flower (3.5–6.5 cm)

Flower more or less without a stalk

© Harry Rose, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40479467>

Sally-my-handsome

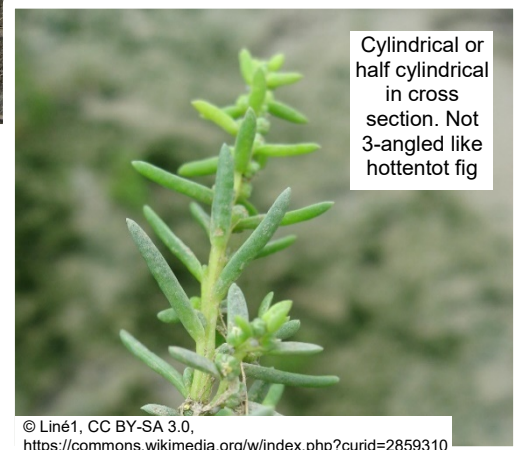
Invasive non-native
(*Carpobrotus acinaciformis*)



Leaves are notably curved and come to an abrupt sharp tip

Larger flower (8–12cm)

© Robert Flogaus-Faust, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=81683048>



Cylindrical or half cylindrical in cross section. Not 3-angled like hottentot fig

© Liné1, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2859310>

References and further reading:

CADI *Carpobrotus edulis* (hottentot fig) data sheet - <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/10648>
Booy O., Wade M. and Roy H. 2015. Field Guide to Invasive Plants and Animals in Britain. Bloomsbury. London.

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.