

Hottentot Fig - *Carpobrotus edulis*

This creeping succulent plant simply loves the sunshine. As the weather improves the large bright pink or pale yellow flowers start to appear and open wider as the sun shines brighter - as dusk or dull days strike the flowers close to await the next ray of sun.

The species, also known as Ice Plant, Pigface or Sour Fig, is actually native to South Africa but has become naturalised in many other regions around the world which share a similar climate. The fruit that is produced is in fact edible and in some countries made into jam - it is quite a tart fruit hence being called sour fig.



The Hottentot is very easy to cultivate by seed or by cutting. It spreads very quickly and densely and is often used to cover banks and slopes along motorways and railway lines as it is a great plant for stabilising the soil and preventing land slip. Unfortunately its dense coverage is also an ecological failing and has been considered a threat in some areas as it invades and competes with lesser plants for light, water and nutrients.

Flowers are pollinated by the many varieties of bee and beetles that crawl over the ground covering surfaces. The fruit is a popular feed for many creatures including rodents and lizards, who are also responsible for spreading the plant further.

This plant is often called 'uña de gato' by the local Spanish people but it should not be confused with the plant known as 'Cats Claw' which is found in the jungles of south and central America and supposedly a folk medicine for intestinal complaints, gastric ulcers, arthritis, and to promote wound healing. It has also been mistakenly called 'Devils Claw' a plant that is native to the Southern parts of Africa, whose tubers are used medicinally as a remedy for general joint pains.