

1. **Acalypha L.** (three-seeded mercury)

Plants annual(perennial herbs, shrubs, or trees elsewhere), monoecious (dioeciouselsewhere), taprooted, with clear sap, pubescent with unbranched, nonglandularand sometimes also gland-tipped hairs; stinging hairs absent. Stems erect,branched or unbranched. Leaves alternate, short- to long-petiolate, the petioleattached at the base of the nonpeltate blade. Leaf blades variously shaped,angled or rounded at the base, angled or tapered to a usually sharply pointedtip, the margins entire or more commonly toothed, often more or less with 3main veins from the base. Stipules scalelike, 0.5–1.5 mm long, tan topurple or sometimes green, usually shed early, linear to narrowly triangular,often with few to several bristly hairs at the tip. Inflorescences axillary andsometimes also terminal, usually associated with longitudinally folded orconcave, persistent, lobed, leaflike bracts, the basic units small clusters ofstaminate or pistillate flowers, these arranged into spikes or racemes, thepistillate clusters either basal to the staminate clusters in the same spike orin separate terminal spikes. Flowers lacking a corolla and nectar disc.Staminate flowers sessile or nearly so, minute (less than 0.5 mm long), with 4linear to narrowly triangular sepals (these hairy) and 4–8 minutestamens having short filaments (these free or fused at the very base).Pistillate flowers with 3(–5) minute, linear to ovate sepals, the ovarywith 1, 2, or more commonly 3 locules and 1 ovule per locule, the 3 stylesseparate or fused only at the very base, each irregularly pinnately divided intoseveral slender lobes. Fruits 2- or 3-lobed (except in A. monococca).Seeds ovoid, with a flattened, oblong to narrowly elliptic, small, whitecaruncle (or this apparently absent), the surface otherwise nearly smooth toshallowly pitted or with small tubercles, dark brown to light gray or tan,sometimes mottled. About 450 species, North America to South America, CaribbeanIslands, Africa, Asia to Australia, Pacific Islands; introduced in Europe.

The large genus Acalypha is most diverse in the American tropics. Several species are cultivated ashouseplants (and outdoors in warmer regions) for their foliage orinflorescences, especially the paleotropical shrub A. hispida Burm. f.(chenille plant, red-hot cattail), which has elongate pistillate spikes whosefuzzy texture and red coloration is caused by the feathery-branched, redstyles.