



The Herb Society of America

Promising Plants Profiles

Peganum harmala

Genus: *Peganum*

Specific Epithet: *harmala*

Common Names: African rue, Syrian rue, harmal, harmel

Family: Nitrariaceae (formerly placed in Zygophyllaceae)

Flower Color: white

Form: shrubby perennial

Hardiness Zone: 7-9 (or lower in dry, sunny situations)

Height: 20-36"

Width: 18-24"

Soil: sandy or gritty, well-drained to dry soil

Sun: full sun

Uses: medicinal, hallucinogenic, dye, culinary (limited)*

Parts Used: seeds, roots, leaves



"Syrian rue is a shrubby perennial in the Nitrariaceae family. It has finely divided leaves, 1-2 inches long and reaches about 20 inches high. Attractive 5-petaled white flowers, 1 inch or so wide, appear in summer, followed by rounded, 3-celled capsules that turn orange-brown when ripe and split open to release numerous dark brown, aromatic seeds. When not in flower, Syrian rue could be mistaken for an *Artemisia* but is not related to either *Artemisia* or to rue.

This is a familiar plant in arid parts of North Africa and the Middle East, and has become naturalized in similar climatic areas of the southwestern United States, South Africa, and New South Wales in Australia, where it is classified as an invasive weed. It thrives in sandy or gritty soil and is an attractive, drought tolerant plant for poor soil and full sun. Though rated as Zone 7-9, it can survive freezing in dry sunny situations but in my experience is difficult to bring through the winter outdoors in areas with damp dull winters. (I dig my plant up and overwinter it in the greenhouse.) Propagation is either by seed or division in spring.

Syrian rue has many uses and is greatly revered in Middle Eastern cultures. It has been important in Arabic medicine since earliest times to treat a wide range of complaints. In Turkey, the seeds are used as a spice, and the capsules yield a red dye, traditionally used in Turkish carpets. The roots and seeds also have hallucinogenic properties. They contain alkaloids, including harmaline which, like any alkaloid, is toxic in excess."

– Deni Bown, Promising Plants Presentation, 2005

* Not GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe). Although the seeds are reportedly used as a spice in Turkey, *P. harmala* contains dangerous alkaloids and can be toxic.

Seed/Plant Source: Richters Herbs – Goodwood, Ontario

Photo © Deni Bown

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