

EUPHORBIA NERIIFOLIA

By Sue Haffner

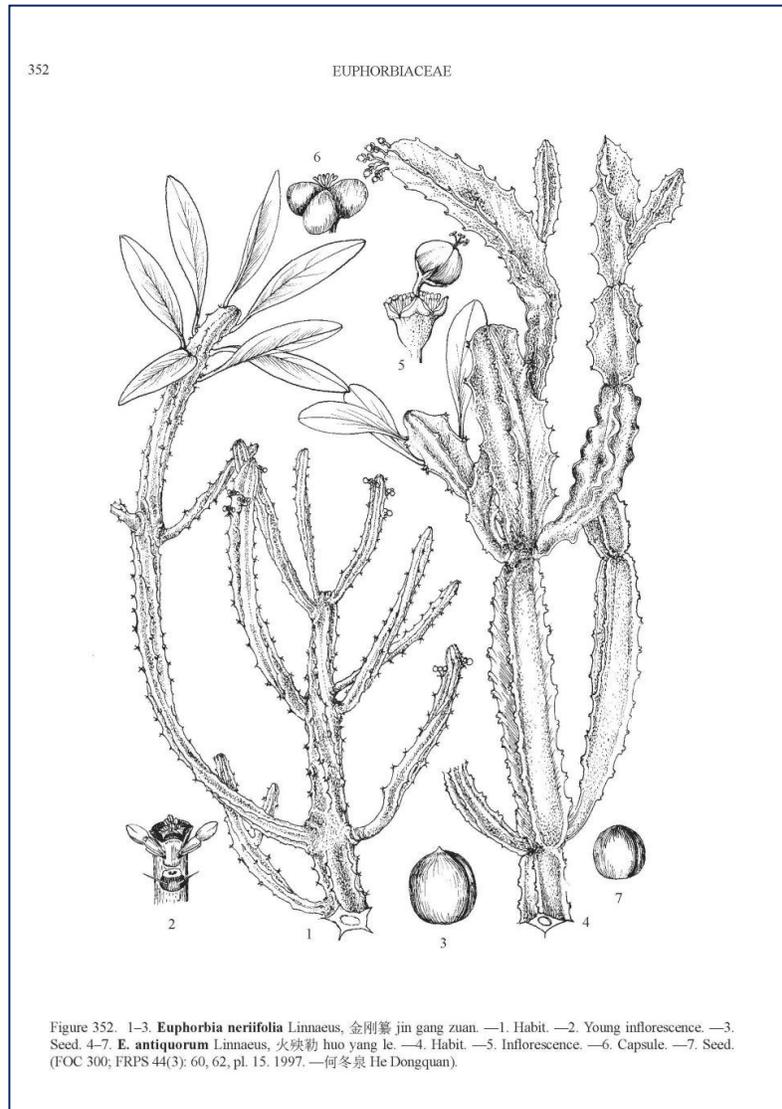


Illustration from www.eFloras.com

The “Indian Spurge Tree” is one of the three large growing euphorbias native to India. The other two are *royleana* and *nivulia*.

Euphorbia neriifolia will grow to a small tree at maturity, with cylindrical or five-angled stems. It branches frequently, with branches curving upward, several inches thick, with just a hint of spiraling angles. The paired spines are short and black. The fleshy or leathery deciduous leaves are 3-5 inches long.

Dr. Ram Gandhi, founder of the Cactus & Succulent Society of India, writes that *E. neriifolia* was known to be found in the south of India, but now occurs all over the country, either in the wild or cultivated. It has a long history as a cultivated plant in collections around the world, either as a potted plant or a landscape subject. It has been introduced on the Canary Islands, where it has escaped into “wild” populations.

There are variegated and cristate forms of this species which are popular with hobbyists. (If you’re lucky, you might find a specimen that is both variegated and crested.) Both of these variant forms are much slower growing than the species.

In the past, I had acquired this plant at various times and found that it never seemed to survive the winter for me. I hadn’t seen it for some time, when I noticed that one of our members was selling rooted cuttings of the crested form at our May show and sale. I made sure to buy one. I have subsequently learned that *E. neriifolia* shouldn’t be allowed to dry out completely in the winter. That means, for me, that I will have to bring it into the house when temperatures drop below 50°.

This plant needs a very porous potting mix. It also should be watered at least weekly during the growing season. It is reportedly very prone to mealy bugs, so it should be checked frequently in order that any infestation can be caught before heroic counter measures have to be taken. If you do have to resort to a bug spray, be forewarned that most of the leaves will probably drop. This can weaken the plant and might lead to rot. As is true with most crested plant forms, a crest of *E. neriifolia* should be shielded from the full all-day summer sun in our area.

The specific name, *neriifolia*, means “leaves like an oleander.”



Photograph from floridanaturepictures.com