

# Native Aquarium Plants

## DIDIPLIS DIANDRA

--- Robert A. Gasser

**Synonym:** *Peplis diandra*.

Water Hedge

**Habitat:** United States,

mostly east of  
the Mississippi

○ The name Water Hedge is very appropriate for this very decorative plant. It grows in thick clusters which eventually completely carpet the tank when growing strongly and, indeed, makes an impenetrable hedge for all but the tiniest fishes.

The striking red color in the plant pictured here was achieved by growing the plant in full direct daylight in the growing season. Many aquarium plants possess the ability to manufacture red pigment of varying intensity, depending on the type of plant in strong light. Some *Vallisnerias*, *Sagittarias*, *Rotala*, *Cryptocorynès*, *Echinodorus* and *Aponogetons* are a few of the more common varieties which can develop reddish hues in strong light. Under conditions of less intense light, *Didiplis diandra* assumes a rich green color which is the color most of us associate with the plant. In full daylight, the plant spreads rather rapidly in a lateral direction with much branching of the stem and remains rather low to the ground, rising to a height of only 7"-9". In weaker light, there is more vertical growth and the rate of growth is considerably slower. It may be of interest to note here that the tank in which the pictured specimen was grown did not contain a particle of algae although it received the benefit of full daylight day after day, month after month. This does not at all imply that *Didiplis diandra* is an algae inhibitor but it is important to the hobbyist to know that a heavily planted tank of healthy growing plants, especially rapid growing types, will successfully compete with and suppress the growth of algae.

One of the plant's faults is its very weak root structure and we observe that, if enough light does not reach the bottom of the stem, the lower part of the

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert A. Gasser has been collecting and cultivating aquarium plants as a hobby since he was thirteen years old. A research chemist for twenty-five years, he left the industry seven years ago to move to Florida and pursue his hobby on a small commercial scale with the accent on quality and rarity of aquarium plants. Currently, his combination business and hobby is run entirely by his wife, Marjorie, and himself, with the part-time help of his teenage sons James and Richard. Over 60 varieties of *Cryptocorynès* --- probably the world's largest selection under cultivation --- have resulted from many years of devoted collection and research.

stem deteriorates and eventually decays, causing the top part to separate and float to the top. Another fault is that, coming from the temperate zone, it tends to be rather seasonal in its growth habits and may have difficulty adjusting to the typical aquarium which, of course, has no seasonal changes. This same seasonality of *Didiplis diandra* makes commercial growing rather uninspiring since the plant declines and hibernates during the winter months, consequently it seems destined to remain one of those "hard to get" plants for the aquarist.

When it is growing strongly it is certainly one of the most fascinating showpieces for the aquarium and can easily be propagated from cuttings which quickly root. Since it grows along edges of streams and ponds it can also be grown as a terrarium plant but

this form of growth is not nearly so attractive --- the leaves grow coarser and assume a rather insipid shade of green all the while growing flat on the surface of the substrate.

○ At certain periods of its growth, it gets tiny reddish brown flowers along the entire length of the stem at the junction of the leaf and stem which resemble tiny pinheads and in our experience, at least, produce no viable seeds.

○ It tolerates normal aquarium temperatures very well and is also quite hardy at temperatures of 60°-70°F. Water is not a factor either but *Didiplis diandra* does better in hard water than soft. If kept with other plants be sure that it is located where taller plants do not shade it in any way. We like to keep it with average size non-aggressive type fishes which do not root in the sand and risk disturbing the weak stem and root structure. The plant in the photo was raised in a tank with guppies and mystery snails.

*Didiplis* belongs to the same family (Lythraceae) as *Rotala rotundifolia* and one can see a similarity in their appearance when grown submerge (see April 1978 issue of FAMA). We got our first specimens from Mr. Albert Greenberg of Florida who first introduced it to the aquarium trade and gave it the name Water Hedge. We have had good success growing it in an aquarium which received natural daylight (at the window) and augmented in the short winter days with incandescent lighting directly over the tank. It seems to prefer shallow tanks where it gets the full benefit of overhead lighting --- if that happens to be the only source of light. If deeper tanks are used, it is best to have some light come in from the side also, such as at the window, so that the bottom of the stem receives good lighting as well as the top. If in time a thin, hard crust of algae builds up on the side glass, it should be scraped off periodically so that it, in itself, does not unduly shade the plant. □