



## *Aspidistra paucitepala* (Asparagaceae), a new species with occurrence of the lowest tepal number in flowers of Asparagales

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### Abstract

The genus *Aspidistra* (Asparagaceae) shows strong variation of flower groundplan. We add further evidence of this variation describing a new species, *Aspidistra paucitepala* from southern Vietnam that has flowers with 2-4 tepals, 2-4 stamens and a gynoeceum with unilocular ovary. Bisexual flowers with three tepals and three stamens are extremely rare among monocots with biotic pollination. Compared with typical trimerous pentacyclic monocot flowers, they can be either interpreted as trimerous and tricyclic or as 1.5-merous (at least in perianth and androeceum) and pentacyclic. Both interpretations imply floral features unusual for 'higher' Asparagales. *Aspidistra paucitepala* resembles recently described *A. brachystyla* from northern Vietnam in narrow funnel-shaped to nearly tubular perianth with very small lobes and short cylindrical pistil with stigma located below the level of anthers. As species of the taxonomically diverse genus *Aspidistra* are frequently observed in the field without reproductive structures and cannot be properly identified, a need for DNA barcoding approach is obvious. We present preliminary data showing that plastid *psbA-trnH* and nuclear 5S-NTS regions could be useful for DNA barcoding of *Aspidistra*.

**Key words:** *Aspidistra*, taxonomy, flower merism, DNA barcoding, Southern Vietnam

### Introduction

The genus *Aspidistra* Ker Gawler (1822: 628) (Asparagaceae) contains about 120 species with centre of diversity in southern China and northern Vietnam, including over 50 species from Vietnam (Tillich 2008, Averyanov & Tillich 2012, 2013a,b, Tillich & Averyanov 2012, Tillich & Leong-Škorničková 2013, Vislobokov *et al.* 2013). Species of *Aspidistra* are common herbs in forests of Southeast Asia. Despite rapid discovery of new species during several previous decades (e.g. Tillich 2005, 2006, Tillich *et al.* 2007, Tillich & Averyanov 2008) *Aspidistra* is still a quite unexplored genus. In particular, only scattered (and somewhat controversial) data on reproductive biology are available (Wilson 1889, Kato 1995, Conran & Bradbury 2007, Vislobokov *et al.* 2013).

Natural range of the genus extends from India to Malaysia and Japan, but only a few species are known from the southern part of its distribution area. *Aspidistra larutensis* De Wilde & Vogel (2006: 126), which is reportedly synonymous to *A. longifolia* Hooker (1892: 326) (Phonsena & De Wilde 2010) or *A. hainanensis* Chun & How (1977: 114) (Tillich & Averyanov 2012), is the southernmost member of the genus (De Wilde & Vogel 2006). Also, there are a few species in southern Vietnam, such as *A. carnosa* Tillich (2005: 318), *A. stricta* Tillich (2005: 322), *A. minutiflora* Stapf (1903: 113) (Tillich 2008), *A. phanluongii* Vislobokov in Vislobokov *et al.* (2013: 349) and others. In this paper, we describe a further new species from southern Vietnam, with uncommon flower structure.

Species of *Aspidistra* are common and sometimes abundant in some types of forest ecosystems in SE Asia. During field explorations of flora and vegetation, members of this taxonomically diverse genus are frequently

In patterns of variation of flower groundplan, *A. paucitepala* partially resembles species of *Potamogeton* Linnaeus (1753: 126) (Potamogetonaceae: Alismatales) that are quite distantly related to *Aspidistra* and have completely different floral biology. In *Potamogeton*, there are usually four tepals, four stamens on the radii of tepals and four carpels alternating with tepals. Less common, along with other types, are flowers with three tepals and three stamens on the same radii, alternating with three carpels (Charlton & Posluszny 1991, Lock *et al.* 2009). All interpretative problems outlined above for *A. paucitepala* can be also applied for *Potamogeton*.

As a final speculation, we could discuss a possibility that flowers behave as three-whorled in all members of the genus *Aspidistra*. One can imagine a perianth of 3+3 relatively narrow tepals, so that outer whorl tepals are situated only slightly outside the inner whorl tepals. In such a situation, a two-whorled trimerous perianth could be transformed into a single-whorled hexamerous perianth, with subsequent developmental and evolutionary flexibility in merism. Consider aestivation pattern in a flower of *Aspidistra petiolata* Tillich (2005: 321) with six tepals illustrated by Tillich (2005). Here, two tepals appear to occupy an outer position relative to three other tepals and a sixth tepal has an innermost position. If this aestivation reflects a developmental pattern, the perianth cannot be regarded as trimerous. Also, tepal aestivation is sometimes valvate in *Aspidistra* (a character that requires further investigation in the genus), which makes recognizing a two-whorled perianth problematic. As pointed out by Ronse De Craene (2010) using examples from eudicots, trimery and hexamery can become superficially similar, and hexamery has often been confused with trimery. Endress (2014), when reviewing multicarpellate gynoecea in angiosperms, mentioned a possible way of (apparent) increasing the carpel number in one whorl is by ‘compression’ of two whorls to the same level, so that they simulate a single whorl. This is somewhat similar to the hypothetical scenario we discuss for the perianth of *Aspidistra*.

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**APPENDIX.** Accessions of *Aspidistra* used in molecular study and GenBank accession numbers. Voucher herbarium specimens are deposited in MW.

Taxon	Locality and collection date	Collectors and collection number	GenBank accession number, 5S-NTS	GenBank accession number, <i>psbA-trnH</i>
<i>Aspidistra</i> sp. 1	Vietnam, Lam Dong prov., Bao Lam distr., Loc Bac municipality, 12 km WNW from Loc Thang town, N 11° 43' 26", E 107° 42' 43", 30 Apr. 2012	A.N. Kuznetsov, S.P. Kuznetsova, M.S. Nuraliev 637	KF465787	KF465795
<i>Aspidistra</i> sp. 1	as above	A.N. Kuznetsov, S.P. Kuznetsova, M.S. Nuraliev 637a	KF465788	KF465796
<i>Aspidistra</i> sp. 1	as above	A.N. Kuznetsov, S.P. Kuznetsova, M.S. Nuraliev 637b	KF465789	KF465797
<i>Aspidistra</i> sp. 2	Vietnam, Dong Nai Prov., Vinh Cuu Distr., 50 km NNE from Bien Hoa, Dong Nai reserve, Ma Da forest district, N 11° 22' 43,7", E 107° 03' 41,1", 22 Nov. 2011	N.A. Vislobokov P221111	KF465784	KF465792
<i>A. paucitepala</i>	Vietnam, Lam Dong prov., Bao Lam distr., Loc Bac municipality, 12 km WNW from Loc Thang town, N 11° 43' 15", E 107° 42' 45", 30 Apr. 2012	A.N. Kuznetsov, S.P. Kuznetsova, M.S. Nuraliev 638	KF465790	KF465798
<i>A. paucitepala</i>	Vietnam, Lam Dong prov., Bao Lam distr., Loc Bac municipality, 12 km WNW from Loc Thang town, N 11° 43' 27", E 107° 42' 58", 06 Apr. 2013	A.N. Kuznetsov, S.P. Kuznetsova, M.S. Nuraliev 771	KF465791	KF465799
<i>A. phanluongii</i>	Vietnam, Dong Nai Prov., Vinh Cuu Distr., 50 km NNE from Bien Hoa, Dong Nai reserve, Ma Da forest district, N 11° 22' 43,7", E 107° 03' 41,1", 18 Dec. 2011	N.A. Vislobokov 09	KF465786	KF465794
<i>A. phanluongii</i>	as above	N.A. Vislobokov 024	KF465785	KF465793