

Acourtia DC. DESERT-PEONY

Acourtia microcephala DC., SACAPELLOTE, CALIFORNIA DESERT-PEONY. Perennial herb, 1–several-stemmed at base, arising from woody caudex, often unbranched, spreading to ascending or erect, 60–160 cm tall; shoots with only cauline leaves, the leaves somewhat rough to touch (not scabrous), densely glandular-puberulent but the hairs without glandular heads, lightly aromatic. **Stems:** ± 10-ridged, to 8 mm diameter, with 1 ridge descending from each leaf and continuous through several internodes, green becoming reddish on exposed surfaces; basal stems somewhat woody; pith spongy, white. **Leaves:** helically alternate, simple, sessile and clasping, without stipules; blade ovate or oblong to widely lanceolate or elliptic, 40–190 × 10–70 mm, with rounded, clasping basal lobes (auriculate) 5–18(–25) mm long, regularly and closely short-dentate with fine points on margins, acute to obtuse with short point at tip, pinnately veined with stiff midrib conspicuously raised and lateral veins slightly raised on lower surface, with short glandular hairs, upper surface often also slightly tomentose along whitish midrib. **Inflorescence:** heads in large, terminal, paniclelike arrays, arrays domed to flat-topped, to 250 × 180 mm, of 100+ heads, with many spreading branches and several heads per ultimate branchlet, head appearing ± ligulate (actually 2-lipped), to 10 mm across, 10–15(–20)-flowered, bracteate, glandular-puberulent; axes of branches spreading, to 100 mm long, with leaflike bracts, axes and bracts reduced upward, each bract potentially subtending a future branchlet, 4–40 × 3–25 mm, the smallest bract clasping-ovate or deltate, short-dentate to entire (small bracts) and wavy on margins; bract subtending peduncle ovate to lanceolate, 2–4 mm long, entire, glandular-hairy on outer surface and margins, glabrous to glabrescent on inner surface; peduncle 2–3 mm long, with 1–3 bracts approaching involucre; **involucre** cylindrical with conic base, 7–10 × 3–3.8 mm, phyllaries 15–18 in 4–5 series, ovate or obovate or oblanceolate to lanceolate, 2–6 × 0.8–1.5 mm, green but purplish red on margins above midpoint and at tips, inner phyllaries sometimes purplish red above midpoint, acuminate at tip, outer surface with short, thick, glandular hairs; receptacle slightly convex, without bractlets (paleae), pitted, glandular-puberulent. **Flower:** bisexual, appearing strap-shaped (ligulate) but actually having a 2-lipped corolla (bilabiate), 1.5–2.5 mm across; **calyx** (**pappus**) of 60+ capillary bristles, 5–7 mm long, dull white, coarsely barbed; **corolla** 2-lipped, deeply cleft; tube 2.5–3 × 0.5 mm, 5-ribbed, light greenish yellow and often glabrous below midpoint, grading to purple-pink or ± lavender with glandular hairs above midpoint; throat expanding to orifice, ca. 1.5 mm long, grading to purple-pink or reddish purple, with glandular hairs; lips strap-shaped, becoming unequal, 5–8 mm long, purplish pink to reddish purple or deep lilac (white), with scattered glandular hairs on lower surface, outer (lower) lip 3-lobed (3-toothed), ± reflexed to recurved, 1.5–2.5 mm wide, inner (upper) lip 2-lobed (2-toothed), ascending and recurved, 1 mm wide, splitting lengthwise from base toward lobes but usually remaining fused at tip; **stamens** 5, fused to base of corolla throat, exserted; filaments ca. 2 mm long, orangey brown; anthers fused into cylinder surrounding style, basifixed, dithecal, 4.5–5 mm long, orange or light yellow with reddish purple on upper 1/3 and 5 purple to orangey lines separating anthers, with long, tail-like basal appendages (1.3–1.5 mm long) and tips stiff, long-triangular, and reddish purple, longitudinally dehiscent; pollen light yellow; **pistil** 1, ovary inferior, cylindrical, 3–4 × 0.5 mm, green, slightly wider at flared tip, densely covered with glandular hairs; style ca.

7.5 mm long, orange, 2-branched, the branches exerted ca. 2 mm above anthers, spreading and tips becoming recurved and coiled, flat on inner face, slightly expanded at stigmatic tip; stigmas 2, pink, papillate on inner face and margins. **Fruits:** cypselae, cylindric, in range 4–4.5 × 0.35–0.5 mm, brown to light brown, shallowly 5-ribbed, covered with glandular hairs; pappus spreading from shallow cup, 5–10 mm long, tawny. Mid-May–mid-July.

Native. Perennial herb found occasionally throughout the range, typically in the shade of large shrubs or in openings of chaparral and coastal sage scrub, in low scrub emerging above neighboring shrubs. *Acourtia microcephala* starts to emerge from the ground in late winter (often late February) and produces large, clasping cauline leaves with many crowded teeth on the margins. This is the only mutisioid composite in range, and has a distinctive 2-lipped flower and long tails on the bases of the anthers. California desert-peony blooms from late spring through early summer, and the large arrays produce more than 100 heads per array, and in fruit produces equally large displays of pappus.

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