

Thymus vulgaris L.

Standardized Common Name: Thyme

Other Common Names: Common Thyme, Garden Thyme

Family: Lamiaceae (Labiatae)

Taxonomy: *Thymus* is native to Eurasia, with a center of diversity in the Mediterranean region, and includes eight sections and 215–350 species, of which several are used commercially and most if not all have potential utility. As the species are variable and hybridize freely even among sections, delimitation of species boundaries is often difficult. *T. vulgaris* and *T. zygis* L. (Spanish Thyme) are classified in Sect. *Thymus*, Subsect. *Thymus*, which comprises about nine species of small shrubs characterized by linear, hairy leaves with revolute margins.

Description: Shrub, (10–)20–30(–50) cm high; branches quadrangular, slender, ascending. Leaves opposite, short-petioled or sessile, 3–12 mm long, 0.5–3 mm broad, linear to elliptical or ovate; base obtuse; apex more or less acute, often rounded at tip; margins revolute; lower surface pubescent with short matted grayish hairs, upper surface glandular-dotted; midrib conspicuous on lower surface. Inflorescence headlike or a series of verticillasters, many-flowered, bracteate; bracts leaflike, broader than leaves and with margins less strongly revolute. Most flowers bisexual, some female. Calyx 3–4 mm long, bilabiate-campulate, (9–)10–12(–13)-nerved, green often with violet spots; upper lip shorter, reflexed, 3-lobed; lower lip longer, pubescent, consisting mostly of two lanceolate teeth. Corolla whitish to pale pink or pale purple, about twice as long as calyx, tubular with weakly asymmetrical lobes; upper lip 1-lobed, emarginate; lower lip 3-lobed. Stamens 4, 2 longer, 2 shorter; may be reduced or absent in some flowers, these flowers smaller than hermaphroditic flowers. Style gynobasic; fruit four nutlets.

Parts in Commerce: Leaves and flowering tops

Identification:

Leaves

- Leaves 3–10(–12) mm long, 0.5–3 mm broad, linear to ovate, tough in texture
- Leaf margins revolute, not ciliate with hairs extending outward
- Lower surface of leaf with grayish coat of hairs; upper surface with small glandular dots
- Midrib prominent on lower surface; venation otherwise inconspicuous
- Base obtuse, sometimes tapering to short petiole
- Apex acute to rounded-acute
- Odor aromatic
- Taste aromatic

Flowering tops

- Inflorescence headlike or an interrupted spike of verticillasters
- Rachis (stem) of inflorescence weak, usually <1 mm in diameter
- Inflorescence bracteate and with small bracteoles subtending flowers
- Bracts resembling leaves, often broader and with weakly revolute margins
- Calyx 3–4 mm long, bilabiate
- Upper calyx lip with 3 acute lobes; lower lip longer than upper, consisting of 2 narrow pubescent teeth
- Corolla usually 6–8 mm long, about twice as long as calyx, tubular, weakly bilabiate
- Corolla pinkish to pale purple or white, often turning pale yellow to brown when dried
- Upper corolla lip 1-lobed, broad and rounded with small notch in center; lower lip 3-lobed
- Odor and taste aromatic

Loose bracts may appear to be leaves that are broader and with flatter margins than expected; they should not be mistaken for contaminants.

Adulterants: Spanish Thyme (*T. zygis*) closely resembles *T. vulgaris* and is often considered freely substitutable. Its leaves are small and always narrow (<1.2 mm broad), with ciliate margins at the base and sometimes a violet midrib. Arthur O. Tucker, PhD has observed widespread substitution of the Moroccan *T. saturejoides* Coss., which has small leaves with the lower surface glandular and hairless, and the margins entire and often basally ciliate.

References:

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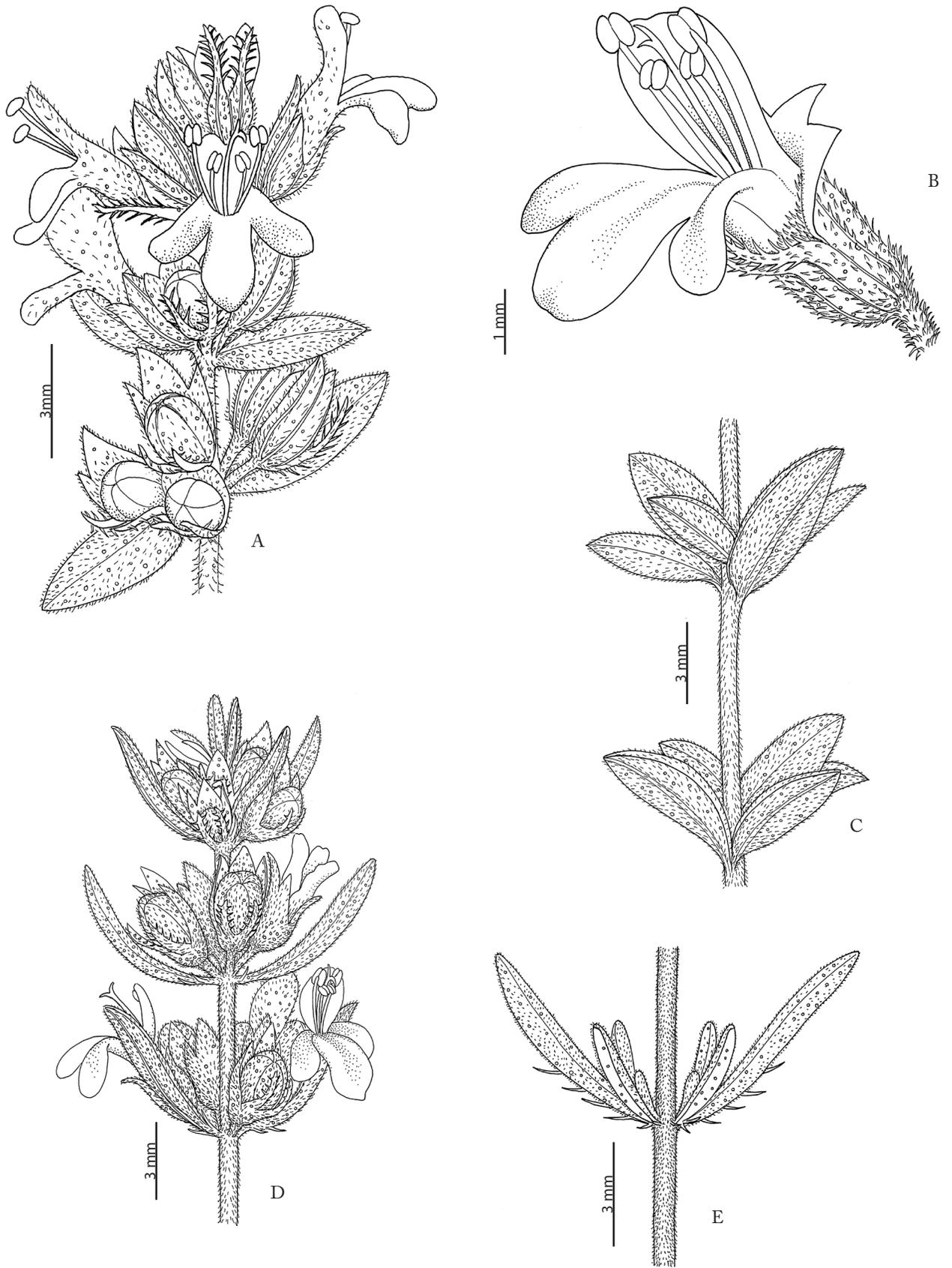


Figure 75: a–c, *Thymus vulgaris* flowering top, flower, and leaves; d–e, *T. zygis* flowering top and leaves.