

1. INTRODUCTION

The genus Coleus is native to the Old World, occurring naturally in Africa, Malaya, Australia and the Pacific islands. In life form it ranges from annual to perennial and in habit from branching herbs to small shrubs, the shrubby habit being attained by perennials after several years of growth.

As a result of the occurrence of coloured foliage, several members of the genus have found use as ornamental plants, and as such have been distributed all over the world. In places where climate and ecological conditions permit, garden escapes have become established in the wild. This has occurred in Trinidad, where two species of Coleus can be commonly found under cacao shade, namely C. blumei Benth. and C. atropurpureus Benth.

The range of leaf colour patterns occurring in the commonly grown varieties of Coleus is very wide. The intensity of pigments and distribution vary considerably, but variation is not confined to colour and pattern only; leaf shape and texture also vary widely in C. blumei at least.

It was decided to investigate as many aspects of leaf coloration and pattern as possible while assessing the level of heterozygosity in the clones collected. Investigation of leaf morphology in C. blumei has not been possible as none of the abnormal types has yet flowered.