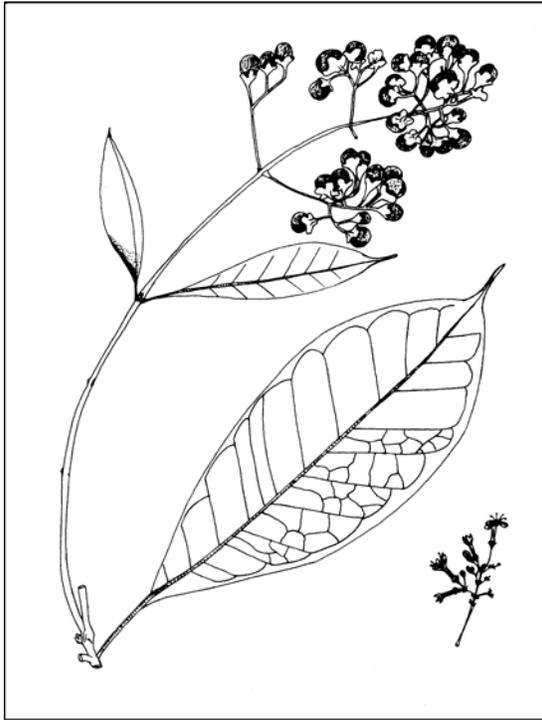


***Aegiphila martinicensis* Jacq.**
VERBENACEAE

Caribbean spiritweed

Synonyms: *Aegiphila glandulifera* Moldenke
Aegiphila panamensis Moldenke



General Description.—Caribbean spiritweed, also known as capaillo, bois cabrit, bois de fer, bwa kabuit, sureau gros, and bois cabroit, is an upright to climbing, evergreen shrub or small tree up to 6 m in height and 7.5 cm in stem diameter. The older stems are gray and furrowed, branches are mostly smooth with lenticels, and twigs are four-angled. The ivory-colored wood is moderately hard and brittle, and the stems have a 2-mm pith. Roots are tan colored and flexible. The opposite, thin leaves are oblong-lanceolate to oblong with entire edges, 8 to 16 cm long by 3 to 8 cm broad, rounded or pointed at the base and long-pointed at the tip. Inflorescences are axillary or terminal, many-flowered cymes. Flowers are white or pale yellow, tubular, and 2 to 6 mm long. From these develop globose to ovoid, yellow, orange, or red, 7- to 10-mm, fleshy fruits with persistent calyxes, a grainy texture, and little flavor. Fruits have one to four brown, elliptical seeds with longitudinal striations (author's observations, Howard 1989, Liogier 1995, Little and others 1974).

Range.—Caribbean spiritweed is native to Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, Mexico to Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, and French Guiana (Howard 1989, Liogier 1995, Little and others 1974, Missouri Botanic Garden 2003). It is not known to have been planted or naturalized elsewhere. Stevens and others (2001) treat the Central American distribution as a separate species (*A. panamensis* Moldenke) based on the shape of the calyx.

Ecology.—Caribbean spiritweed is rare in Puerto Rico (Little and others 1974) but is common in Nicaragua (Stevens and others 2001). It occurs in forests and brushy areas in foothills and lower mountains of Puerto Rico from 60 to 244 m in elevation in areas of limestone, other sedimentary, and igneous rocks (Little and others 1974). In Nicaragua, the species grows in forests and pastures in wet to dry areas from near sea level to 900 m elevation (Stevens and others 2001). Caribbean spiritweed is moderately intolerant of shade and is able to flower and fruit in partial shade.

Reproduction.—Caribbean spiritweed flowers and fruits irregularly throughout the year (Little and others 1974). The fruits ripen a few at a time in each infructescence rather than all at once. A collection of fresh fruits from Puerto Rico weighed an average of 0.496 ± 0.026 g/fruit. Air-dried seed separated from them averaged 0.0331 ± 0.0007 g/seed or 30,000 seeds/kg. Placed on moist blotter paper without pretreatment, 61 percent germinated between 1 and 4.5 months after sowing (author's observation). Germination was hypogeal (cotyledons remain below ground). Seeds are probably dispersed by birds. Caribbean spiritweed sprouts when cut and may resprout to replace senescent stems.

Growth and Management.—Caribbean spiritweed grows relatively rapidly, about 1 m/year. Stems may live 5 years or more. No planting or management experience has been published.

Benefits.—Caribbean spiritweed helps protect the soil and furnishes food and cover for wildlife. Larva of the hawk moth, *Manduca hannibal hannibal*, apparently feed exclusively on Caribbean spiritweed (Oehlke 2003). Infusions of the leaves and twigs have been used as a diuretic and as a pleasant tonic for treating asthma (Núñez-Melédez 1982). In Costa Rica, the plant is considered an aphrodisiac (Duke 2003).

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