

*Cestrum laurifolium* L'Hér.  
SOLANACEAE

dama de noche

Synonyms: *Cestrum citrifolium* Ritz in Hoffm.  
*Cestrum alaternoides* Poir. in Lam.  
*Cestrum lambertii* Dunal in DC.



**General Description.**—Dama de noche, also known as candlewood, torch, galán de monte, bois-flambeau, and citronnier, is an evergreen shrub usually 1 to 2 m in height but sometimes reaching 4 m. Dama de noche is a Puerto Rican name meaning lady of the night. It has one or a small number of stems arising from the root crown or low on the main stem. The plant tends to root shallowly with stout lateral roots that are hard and woody with a corky or fleshy bark. The stems and branches are slender with gray bark and grow vertically for 1 to 2 m and then curve horizontally. The alternate, glabrous leaves are shiny green on the upper surface, narrowly elliptic to obovate, with a short petiole and blades that are 4 to 15 cm long. The inflorescences are short axillary racemes with three to five yellow or greenish-yellow, five-lobed, tubular flowers 10 to 20 mm long. The fruits are purple to black, ovoid to subglobose berries, 6 to 10 mm long, with a persistent calyx. There are one to three or more black seeds per fruit

with an ivory spot on the ventral side (author's observation, Howard 1989, Liogier 1995).

**Range.**—Dama de noche is native to Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Lesser Antilles, and Trinidad (Grisebach 1963, Howard 1989, Liogier 1995).

**Ecology.**—Dama de noche is most common in areas underlain by limestone rocks but also grows in areas of igneous rocks. The soils are well drained, often rocky with a wide range of textures. In Puerto Rico, it may be found from a little above sea level to about 500 m in elevation and in areas that receive from about 900 to 2200 mm of annual precipitation. Dama de noche has an intermediate tolerance of shade. It usually grows in the understory of medium- to low-density forest. The species grows and fruits best when small openings allow broken overhead sunlight to enter. Dama de noche does not invade disturbed areas quickly and so is mainly found in middle and late secondary forests and remnant forests. It can be quite common but does not form dense stands.

**Reproduction.**—Dama de noche is a good fruit and seed producer and may yield a few to 100 or more fruits per season. Flowering and fruiting seem to be synchronized, at least within a given area. Fruits were observed ripening in a forest in the north of Puerto Rico during the dry season (March). A collection of fruits from that area averaged  $0.290 \pm 0.012$  g/fruit. Air-dried seeds separated from them averaged  $0.0169 \pm 0.0004$  g/seed or 59,200 seeds/kg. Sown on commercial potting mix, 93 percent germinated between 14 and 60 days after sowing. Seeds are apparently dispersed by birds, and seedlings are well scattered and not abundant. Plants resprout when cut or damaged.

**Growth and Management.**—Dama de noche appears to have a moderate growth rate, probably not exceeding 1 m of height growth per year. No nursery, planting, or management experience has been published. Protection of forests from fires

and development is recommended to encourage the formation and development of natural stands.

**Benefits.**—Dama de noche contributes to the biodiversity of the forests where it grows, helps protect the soil, and furnishes food and cover for wildlife. The stems are generally too small to use for fuel.

### **References**

Grisebach, A.H.R. 1963. Flora of the British West Indies. J. Cramer-Weinheim, New York. 789 p.

Howard, R. A. 1989. Flora of the Lesser Antilles, Leeward and Windward Islands. Vol. 6. Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, Jamaica Plain, MA. 658 p.

Liogier, H.A. 1995. Descriptive flora of Puerto Rico and adjacent islands. Vol. 4. Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan, PR. 617 p.

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