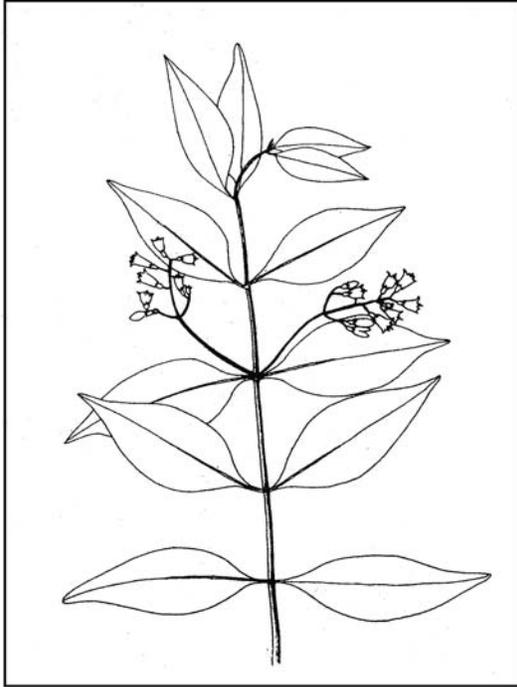


Chiococca alba (L.) A.S. Hitchc.
RUBIACEAE

West Indian snow-berry

Synonyms: *Lonicera alba* L.
Chiococca racemosa L.



General Description.—West Indian snow-berry, is also known as David's root, bejuco de berac, buenda, liane des sorciers and several other common names (Howard 1989). It is one of the most common woody plants in Puerto Rican moist forests. The species grows as a scrambling shrub or woody vine that often climbs taller vegetation and may reach 6 m of extension (Acevedo-Rodríguez and Woodbury 1985). The slender, green stems and branches are four-angled to round in cross section. Opposite branching occurs at the nodes where one or two shoots develop. A vertical shoot at each node commonly ascends from prostrate stems. The root system consists of shallow laterals and abundant fine roots. West Indian snow-berry has opposite, thin to coriaceous, dark green leaves that are ovate or oblong and pointed at the tip and pointed to rounded at the base. The petioles are 2 to 10 mm long and tiny lobbed stipules are present (Liogier 1997).

Range.—West Indian snow-berry grows naturally in Florida, the Bahamas, through the Greater and

Lesser Antilles, in Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. The species is not known to have naturalized outside its native range.

Ecology.—West Indian snow-berry grows in moist and dry forests from near sea level to 700 m or more in all types of topography. It will grow on soils of all textures derived from both sedimentary and igneous parent materials including ultramafic rocks (serpentine). Very poorly drained and highly saline conditions are not tolerated. The species may be found in remnant forests in both natural openings and the understory. It invades brushy pastures and roadsides and appears early in the reforestation process. It is intermediate in tolerance to shade. West Indian snow-berry competes well with weeds and brush, but does not prosper in dense grass swards. The species does not appear to be seriously affected by any insect or disease.

Reproduction.—West Indian snow-berry flowers in Puerto Rico from June through October and yields ripe fruits from June through December (Acevedo-Rodríguez and Woodbury 1985). The small white, cream, or yellow flowers are borne in racemes that arise from the leaf axils. The globose but slightly flattened fruits are white and vary in size (4 to 8 mm) and weight (by a factor of 3) in the same inflorescence. The fruits are sweet with little other flavor. The average fruit weight from a Puerto Rico collection was 0.117 ± 0.003 g. The dark brown seeds, which averaged about two per fruit, weighed 0.004 ± 0.000 g. Germination is epigeal. For the above sample, germination was 48 percent and occurred between 33 and 59 days after sowing. Stems root when they come in contact with the soil, which results in interconnected patches and many independent plants. Asexual reproduction by air layers and rooted cuttings should be easy. Long distance dispersal appears to be principally done by birds.

Growth and Management.—West Indian snow-berry plants under moderate canopy openings grow up to 0.5 m per year in each of its many stems. Plants develop slowly in the nursery,

requiring 3 months to grow large enough to prick into pots and about an additional year to reach outplanting size. Seedlings and sections of older plants can be dug up in the forest and transplanted successfully (Workman 1980). Once established, West Indian snow-berry needs little maintenance.

Benefits.—West Indian snow-berry is used to a limited extent as an ornamental in naturalistic landscaping (Workman 1980) and is sometimes cultivated as a flowering vine in greenhouses (Bailey 1941). Being very common and widespread, the species contributes to the biodiversity of many Neotropical forests. It is grazed by cattle, goats and certainly wild ruminants and produces fruits that are eaten by birds and other animals. The roots of West Indian snow-berry are used as a purgative, diuretic, vomitive, and antidiarrhetic in herbal medicine (Liogier 1990).

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John K. Francis, Research Forester, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, International Institute of Tropical Forestry, Jardín Botánico Sur, 1201 Calle Ceiba, San Juan PR 00926-1119, in cooperation with the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, PR 00936-4984