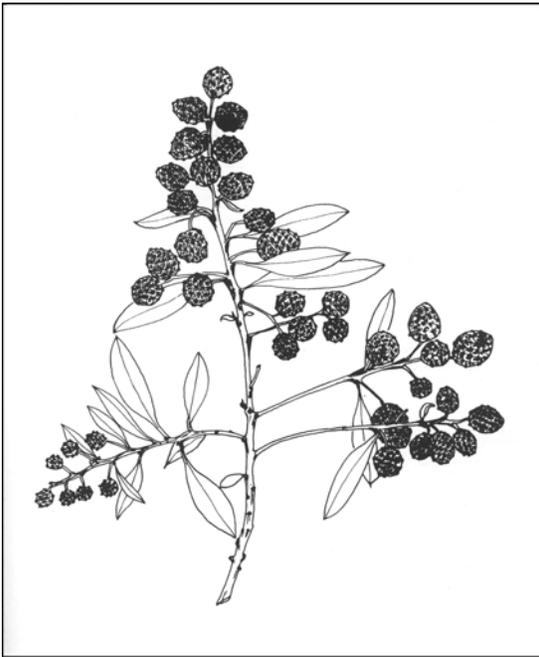


***Conocarpus erectus* L.**
COMBRETACEAE

button mangrove

Synonyms: *Conocarpus procumbens* L.
Conocarpus erectus var. *procumbens* (L.) DC.
Conocarpus erectus var. *sericeus* DC.
Conocarpus sericeus Jiménez
Conocarpus supinus Crantz
Terminalia erecta (L.) Baill.



General Description.—Button mangrove is also known as buttonwood, sea mulberry, botoncillo, mangle prieto, mangle negro, palétuvier, and mangué. The species is usually a shrub 1.5 to 4 m in height but can become a tree up to 20 m or more in height. The root system consists mainly of laterals and fine roots that are dark brown, weak and brittle, and have a corky bark. The plant usually has an erect trunk or multiple trunks, but it may assume a prostrate form and have limbs that layer and become new individuals. The bark is gray or brown, furrowed, fibrous, and moderately thin (about 8 mm). The inner bark is dark cream in color. Stemwood (specific gravity of 1.0) is hard, heavy, and strong. Branches are brittle. The twigs are slender, yellow-green, angled, flattened, or winged. The spirally arranged, elliptic to lanceolate leaves are cartaceous to somewhat fleshy, 2 to 10 cm long, with petioles 3 to 9 mm long. Inflorescences are terminal or axillary

panicles of tiny greenish-white flowers grouped in spheroidal heads 3 to 5 mm in diameter. The thin, dry, 5- to 15-mm, two-winged seeds are densely packed into globose clusters (Howard 1989, Liogier 1994, Little and Wadsworth 1964, Nelson 1996, Pennington and Sarukhan 1968, Stevens and others 2001).

Range.—Button mangrove is native to Bermuda, both coasts of southern Florida, the Bahamas, the West Indies, both coasts of Mexico, Central America, South America (through Ecuador and Brazil), and the Galapagos Islands. It is also native to coastal areas of Tropical West Africa (Howard 1989, Little and Wadsworth 1964). The species has been planted widely as an ornamental and has naturalized in at least Hawaii (Pacific Island Ecosystems at Risk 2002).

Ecology.—Button mangrove is intolerant of shade. It is almost always open-grown or in codominant stands. It will tolerate competition by plants of similar size but will not grow under the canopy of taller trees. The species grows above the high tide line, along beaches and just landward of *Laguncularia racemosa* (L.) Gaertn. and other mangroves. The soils in these situations are usually sandy or marly but sometimes loamy or clayey. Button mangrove is particularly adaptable as an ornamental because it tolerates compacted soil, air pollution, poor drainage, and drought (Gilman and Watson 1993). It also tolerates salt water overwash from storm surges and heavy salt spray. The species grows, although much less commonly, on the lower floodplains of rivers and in upland forests. Herbarium samples have been collected at elevations of 745 m in Costa Rica (Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad 2002).

Reproduction.—Button mangrove blooms throughout the year in México (Pennington and Sarukhan 1968) and from March to September in Florida (Nelson 1996). Tomlinson (1986)

maintains that this species is dioecious. It is a consistent and abundant seed producer throughout most of its range. The fruit heads may contain from 35 to 56 fruits each (Masís and others 1999). Seeds collected in Puerto Rico averaged 250,000 seeds/kg. Seeds from this collection began germinating on moist filter paper in 9 days but were only 12 percent viable (Francis and Rodríguez 1993). The seeds are dispersed by water (Pacific Island Ecosystems at Risk 2002). Button mangrove can be propagated by partially burying large stakes in moist ground for living fence posts (Little and Wadsworth 1964).

Growth and Management.—Button mangrove has a medium growth rate (Gilman and Watson 1993) and may live for several decades. Information is not available on wildland plantation establishment. The planting of potted or containerized seedlings seems the safest approach. The species is not aggressive or invasive and only requires control when land is converted to other uses.

Benefits.—Button mangrove provides food and cover for wildlife (various species of crabs and insects). It protects the soil during storm surges and helps “fix” dunes (Popp and others 1989). Both button mangrove and silver buttonwood (*C. erectus* var. *sericeus* Griseb.) are widely planted as ornamentals in yards, parking lots, streets and parks (Gilman and Watson 1993, Nelson 1996). It can be trained to form hedges. Potted plants are used to form bonsai (Gilman and Watson 1993). Button mangrove wood is reported to be ideal for smoking fish and meat (Gilman and Watson 1993). The wood is durable but susceptible to dry-wood termites, (*Cryptotermes brevis* (Walker) and is used to make railroad ties, posts, for turnery, boat building, fuel, and charcoal. The bark and leaves have been used in tannery (Little and Wadsworth 1964). Bark from Belize contains 18 percent tannin (Burkill 1985). Extracts of the bark are used to treat bleeding gums, vaginal bleeding, colic, and skin ulcers (Liogier 1990).

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