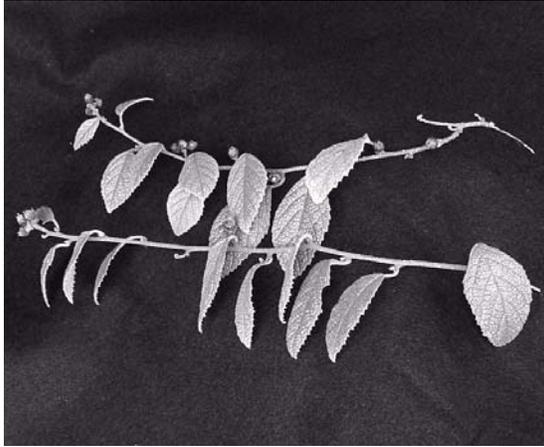


***Cordia lima* (Desv.) Roemer & J.A. Schultes**
BORAGINACEAE

lija

Synonyms: *Varronia lima* Desv.
Cordia radula Spreng.
Cordia asperrima DC.



General Description.—Lija, which means sandpaper in Spanish, is an evergreen, vine-like, arching shrub 1 to 2.5 m in height and 1 to 2 cm in basal diameter. Lija plants are supported by weak taproots, slender lateral roots, and abundant fine roots. The roots are dark brown. Older plants usually have a number of stems that grow vertically for 1 to 2 m and then arch horizontally. Supported on other vegetation without twining or tendrils, they sometimes extend 4 m or more laterally. The relatively few branches and twigs are slender. The leaves are 2 to 6 cm long, stiff and almost woody, ovate or elliptic, with toothed edges and a rough texture imparted by short, stiff hairs. The inflorescences are terminal or lateral glomerules of small white subsessile flowers. These produce globose one-seeded fruits (drupes) that are red when ripe and 4 to 5 mm in diameter. The fruits have a mild, pleasantly sweet flavor (author's observation, Grisebach 1963, Liogier 1995).

Range.—Lija is native to Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas (Grisebach 1963, Liogier 1995). It is not known to have been planted or naturalized elsewhere.

Ecology.—Lija grows in dry to moist habitat (about 700 to 1800 mm of mean annual precipitation) at elevations from near sea level to at least 600 m. Colonized soils are variable in texture with pH's from about 5.0 to 7.5, well

drained, and usually rocky, on ridges, hillsides, and in draws. Although the species grows over other rock types, it is most common in limestone and ultramafic (serpentine) areas. Lija is moderately intolerant of shade and competes well with herbs and brush. It grows under and at the edges of remnant forests and middle to late secondary low forests with relatively low basal areas. The species varies from uncommon to relatively common in Puerto Rico. Individual plants are usually widely scattered.

Reproduction.—A collection of fresh fruits from Puerto Rico averaged 0.261 ± 0.010 g/fruit. Air-dried seeds separated from them averaged 0.0515 ± 0.0013 g/seed or 19,000 seeds/kg. Placed to germinate on moist filter paper, 16 percent germinated within 6 months. Other germination tests are needed to determine whether this is low for the species. Pretreatments do not appear necessary. Apparently, the seeds are dispersed by birds. Seedlings in natural forests are uncommon. Established plants sprout when disturbed.

Growth and Management.—Lija is a slow-growing shrub. Adult plants add only 10 to 30 cm to their stem length annually. Individual stems appear to live 1 or 2 decades while plants, by sprouting, may live much longer. No planting or management experience has been published for the species. Protection from fire and development are probably all that is required in relatively undisturbed sites.

Benefits.—Lija contributes to the biodiversity in forests where it lives, helps protect the soil, and furnishes food and cover for wildlife. The fruits are tasty but too small and too infrequently found to justify collection.

References

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