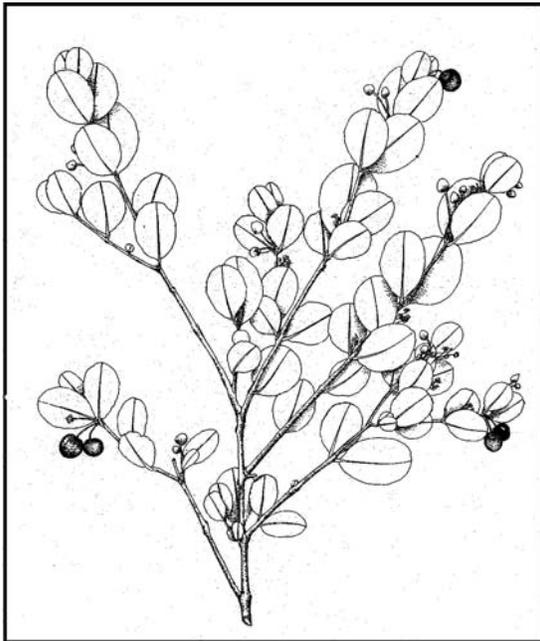


***Crossopetalum rhacoma* Crantz**  
CELASTRACEAE

maidenberry

Synonyms: *Rhacoma crossopetalum* L.  
*Myginda rhacoma* Sw.  
*Myginda rotundata* Lam.  
*Myginda pallens* J.E. Sm. in Rees  
*Crossopetalum pallena* (J.E. Sm.) Kuntze  
*Rhacoma pallens* (J.E. Sm.) G. Maza  
*Myginda latifolia* M. Vahl



**General Description.**—Maidenberry is also known as Florida crossopetalum, rhacoma, poison-cherry, coral, manto, maravedí, palo de paloma, pico de paloma, limonejo, membrillo, ti bonbon, bonbon rouge, and placa chiquitu. It is an evergreen shrub sometimes becoming a small tree. It commonly measures 1 to 3 m in height but may reach 8 m. The shrub is supported by a major taproot and significant lateral roots with yellow bark. Maidenberry usually has multiple stems from the root crown and just above, and many branches. Three shoots form at each node, one of which usually dies. The opposite or ternate leaves have a petiole about 1 mm long, lanceolate to obovate leathery blades usually with wavy-toothed edges. The tiny greenish-red flowers are borne in axillary cymes. The fruits that follow are fleshy, egg-shaped drupes that ripen to a bright red. Each contains a stone and one or two seeds (Howard

1989, Liogier 1994, Little and others 1974).

**Range.**—Maidenberry is native to Southern Florida, the West Indies, and Venezuela (Howard 1989, Liogier 1994, Little and others 1974, Alarcón 2001). Howard (1989) and Liogier (1994) state that it is found in Mexico and Central America, but the species is not listed in the current check lists for countries in the region.

**Ecology.**—Maidenberry is usually found in rocky and dry or excessively drained sites. It tolerates a wide range of well-drained soil types derived from sedimentary (including limestone), igneous, and metamorphic (including ultramafic) rocks. In Puerto Rico, maidenberry grows from near sea level to 400 m in elevation in areas that receive from 750 to about 1600 mm of precipitation. It is moderately intolerant of shade and withstands only moderate competition from grasses and shrubs. The species will survive but not prosper under low basal-area dry forest. The roots support vascular-arbuscular mycorrhizae (TreeGuide Inc. 2002). Maidenberry is listed as endangered in Florida (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 1997); however, it is relatively common in Puerto Rico and several West Indian islands (Little and others 1974). In Florida, it is found in pinelands and occasionally hammocks (Nelson 1996). In the West Indies, maidenberry grows in remnant and secondary forests, most often on rocky ridges and hillsides. The species' continued presence in overgrazed areas suggests that it is not palatable to cattle.

**Reproduction.**—Maidenberry flowers and fruits year-round as a process associated with new stem growth (Nelson 1996). Birds disperse the seeds. Despite almost constant fruit production, seedlings are not common. Plants readily sprout when cut or burned.

**Growth and Management.**—Maidenberry grows slowly and may live for several decades. No management experience has been published. However, cattle grazing to reduce competition from grass, herbs, and vines will probably encourage reproduction and survival.

**Benefits.**—Maidenberry furnishes food and cover for wildlife and protects the soil. It is listed as one of the food plants for the endangered Anegada iguana, *Cyclura pinguis* (International Reptile Conservation Foundation 2002). The wood of maidenberry is light brown and hard, but is used only for fuel. All the plant tissues, especially the roots, are diuretic and are used to promote urination and to treat kidney and bladder infections (Liogier 1990).

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