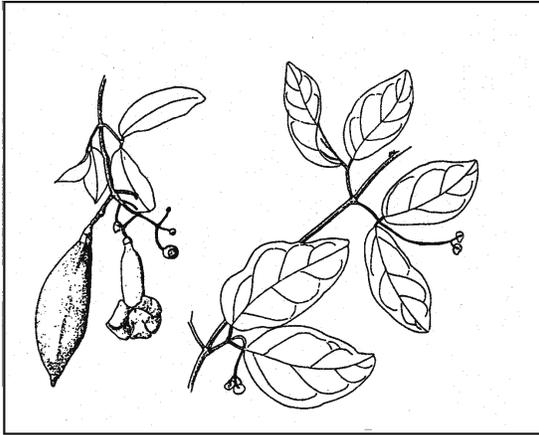


***Distictis lactiflora* (Vahl) DC.**
BIGNONIACEAE

pega palo

Synonyms: *Bignonia lactiflora* Vahl
Bignonia rigescens Jacq.
Bignonia odorata Bello
Distictis rigescens (Jacq.) DC.
Macrodiscus lactiflorus (Vahl) Bureau ex Baill.



General Description.—Pega palo, also known as liana fragante and viuda, is a climbing woody vine that clings to objects by means of sticky disks and may extend 6 m or more into the crowns of trees or laterally along rocks and fences (Acevedo-Rodríguez 1985). Older plants may have multiple stems arising from ground level. Like many other vines in the Bignoniaceae, pega palo has a characteristic pattern in the stem cross-section, shamrock-shaped in this case. The brown stems are slender, furrowed, and fissured. Older plants have no taproot, only lateral roots with sinkers and a moderate amount of fine roots. The larger roots have the same general appearance as the stems. There are few branches until the crown of the plant is reached. Branches usually arise in three's at the nodes (author's observation). The opposite, compound leaves have two leaflets with the tendril in place of a third leaflet. The leaf blades are ovate, 3 to 8 cm long, and obtuse, rounded, or acute at the tip. Terminal panicles support a few white tubular flowers with a yellow throat, 3 to 7 cm long. A few of the flowers develop into narrowly ellipsoid, somewhat flattened capsules 7 to 12 cm long and brown at maturity. They split open by a medial suture and release brown, winged seeds (Liogier 1995, Acevedo-Rodríguez 1985). Pega palo occurs in the same areas and is similar in appearance to *Macfadyena unguis-cati*

(L.) A. Gentry. They are distinguished by the tripartite tendril, yellow flower, and long pod of *M. unguis-cati*.

Range.—Pega palo is native to Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. It has been introduced into Guadeloupe (Liogier 1995).

Ecology.—Pega palo grows in areas that receive from about 750 to 2000 mm of annual precipitation. It grows on most types of well-drained to excessively drained soils derived from sedimentary (including limestone), igneous, and metamorphic (including ultramafic) rocks. Pega palo grows from near sea level to over 600 m in elevation. The species is moderately intolerant, growing in low basal-area forests, forest edges and openings, brushy pastures, fencerows, and disturbed forests. Pega palo is not eaten by cattle and is often common in overgrazed range. Although the usual habit of the species is to ascend into trees or over rocks, it forms mounds and scrambles over the ground when trees are absent. Pega palo resprouts after fires. An unknown insect in Puerto Rico often destroys all the seeds in immature capsules.

Reproduction.—Pega palo flowers from December to July (Acevedo-Rodríguez 1985). Because the species requires nearly full sunlight to bloom and fruit and because it does not climb to the tops of most of the trees it invades, fruiting plants are not abundant. A collection of fruits from Puerto Rico contained seeds of which only about one in four contained endosperm. Visually culled, filled seed weighed an average of 0.0153 g or 65,000 seeds/kg. Sown without any pretreatment on peat, 55 percent germinated within 44 days. Germination is hypogenous. Seedlings, whose first two leaves have an unusual dark-green color tinged with purple and a whitish net-like vein pattern, are common, but few survive the first year (author's observation). Vines layer (root) when they come in contact with the ground.

Growth and Management.—Pega palo grows at least a meter per year from sprouts. Individual vines live several years, and strong plants develop new stems periodically. Grazing of dry and moist forest areas probably promotes the species.

Benefits.—Pega palo contributes to the biodiversity of moist and dry forests and helps protect the soil. Its foliage and white flowers add to the beauty of the forest. The species has been used as an ornamental to a limited extent.

References

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