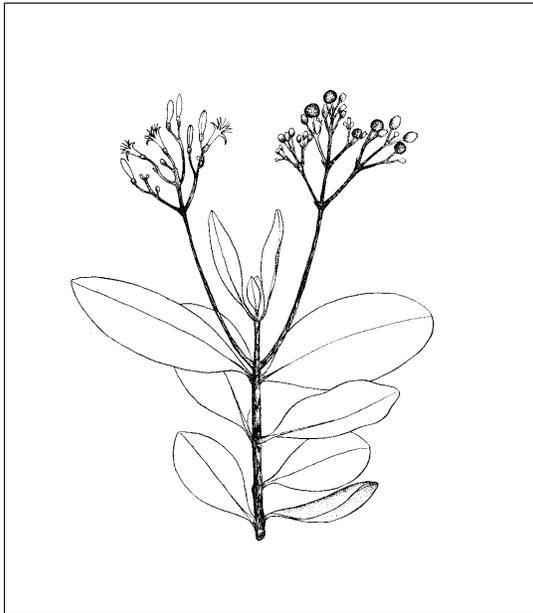


Erithalis fruticosa L.

RUBIACEAE

black torch

Synonyms: *Erithalis revoluta* Urban
Erithalis angustifolia DC.
Erithalis elliptica Raf.
Erithalis inodora Jacq.
Erithalis odorata Pers.
Erithalis parviflora Griseb.



General Description.—Black torch, also known as candlewood, tea, parrot apple, cubra prieta, jayajabico, manglillo, tarro de chivo, bois flambeau, and bois chandelle, is an evergreen shrub that typically is 1 or 2 m in height but occasionally reaches 8 m in height. Usually the species has multiple stems arising near the ground line and many branches that are stiff and sometimes gnarled. The bark is gray and smoothish to warty. The resinous wood is brown, hard, fine-textured, heavy, and has visible growth rings. Black torch plants are supported by brown roots that are often contorted as they grow over rocks and into cracks. The foliage may be dense or diffuse depending on whether the shrubs grow in full sun or partial shade. The opposite leaves have 3 to 20 mm petioles, orbicular to oblanceolate blades 2 to 12 cm long with entire edges, and dark-green upper surfaces. The inflorescences are lateral or terminal panicles containing many small, white flowers. The black fruits are globose or flattened

drupes 3 to 4 mm in diameter that have a bitter-sweet flavor and contain five to 10 nutlets (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997, Little and others 1974, Nelson 1996). It is morphologically a highly variable species (Long and Lakela 1976).

Range.—Black torch is native to Florida, the Bahamas, the Greater and Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, Margarita and other Venezuelan islands, Quintana Roo (Mexico), and Belize (Howard 1989, Little and others 1974).

Ecology.—Black torch grows from near sea level to 120 m in elevation in Puerto Rico (Little and others 1974) in areas that receive from 750 mm to about 1800 mm of annual precipitation. The species is drought-hardy and moderately intolerant of shade and can grow under the canopy of low-density forest. Because of slow growth, it is restricted to areas with reduced competition. Black torch is most common near beaches and on rock outcroppings and bluffs near the shoreline, especially in moist limestone areas, and on limestone hills in the interior. In Florida, black torch is found in beach strand vegetation, on sand dunes, and coastal hammocks (Nelson 1996).

Reproduction.—Black torch flowers and fruits throughout the year (Little and others 1974, Nelson 1996). Open-grown individuals produce fruits and seeds in abundance. Fruits collected in Puerto Rico averaged 0.1087 ± 0.0071 g/fruit. Air-dried seeds separated from them averaged 0.00092 g/seed or 1,080,000 seeds/kg. Presumably, the seeds are dispersed by birds that eat the fruits. Seedlings and saplings are relatively common in Puerto Rico. The stems layer (root) when they come in contact with the ground.

Growth and Management.—Black torch is slow growing, especially when situated on rock outcrops. Management should mainly consist of protection from fires and clearing of sites for

development.

Benefits.—Black torch contributes to biodiversity in the forests where it grows, helps protect the soil, and furnishes food and cover for wildlife. It would probably make an acceptable ornamental for green areas and nonirrigated gardens. The wood is good for turned articles but available only in small sizes. It is resistant to rot and has been used for piles and posts. Formerly, it was split and used for torches (Little and others 1974) but tended to be smoky (University of the Virgin Islands 2002). The bark, fruits, and the resin have diuretic and astringent properties and are used to treat inflammation of the kidney and bladder, and blennorrhoea (Liogier 1990). The leaves are parched and ground and used to treat skin sores (University of the Virgin Islands 2002).

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