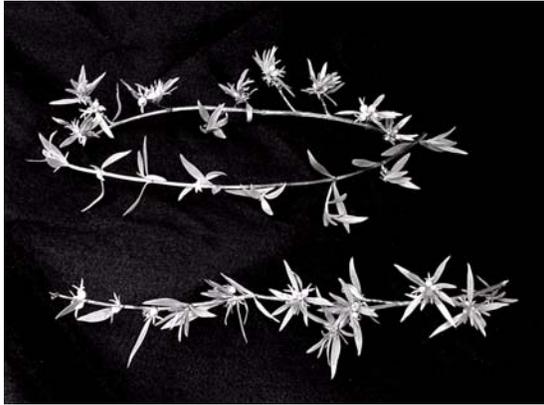


Ernodea littoralis Sw.
RUBIACEAE

golden creeper

Synonyms: *Ernodea angusta* Small



General Description.—Golden creeper, also known as cough bush, beach creeper, wild pomegranate, ernodia de playa, wild pamgramma, and liane-séche, is an evergreen prostrate or arching shrub to about 1.5 m in height. Heavy lateral roots support the plants. The stems are four-angled and orange or reddish brown. Golden creeper leaves have a short petiole (1 to 2 mm), lanceolate blades, and a spiny, pointed tip. In some environments, leaves are somewhat fleshy; in others they are hard or coriaceous. White-to-pink tubular flowers are solitary, axillary, and sessile. The fleshy fruits are golden orange, in the shape of tiny pomegranates, and have an apple-like flavor. The seeds, borne one per fruit, are brown with a longitudinal furrow (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997, Nelson 1996).

Range.—Golden creeper is native to Southern Florida, the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles as far south as Marie Galante, Mexico, Belize, and Honduras (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997). It is planted as an ornamental but is not known to have naturalized into any new range as a result.

Ecology.—Golden creeper will grow in acidic to mildly alkaline soils with the whole range of textures (Gilman 1999) and over a variety of parent materials including serpentine. In Puerto Rico, it grows in areas receiving from 750 to about 1400 mm of mean annual precipitation and at elevations from near sea level to about 400 m. Golden creeper is tolerant of salt spray and mild

salt concentration in the soil. The species is drought-tolerant and usually grows in excessively drained sites. However, it withstands short-term flooding (Carney-Kulig and others 2002). In Florida, it is common in coastal dunes (Nelson 1996). The variety *angusta* grows in pinelands in Florida (Workman 1980). In Puerto Rico, golden creeper also grows on coastal rocks (usually limestone) and on rocky ultramafic (serpentine) slopes. It is a sun-loving plant that usually grows in the open. When the shrubs grow under low trees in open forest, they do not become thick and robust. Golden creeper benefits from mild disturbance that eliminates shade and taller competition.

Reproduction.—Golden creeper blooms and fruits all year (Gilman 1999, Nelson 1996). Fruits collected in Puerto Rico weighed an average of 0.0467 ± 0.0014 g/fruit. Air-dried seeds separated from them weighed an average of 0.0078 ± 0.0002 g/seed or 128,000 seeds/kg. Sown without pretreatment on commercial potting mix, 24 percent germinated between 35 and 146 days of sowing (author's observation). The fruits are presumably eaten and the seeds dispersed by birds. Once established, plants thicken and spread by root suckering and layering.

Growth and Management.—The growth rate of golden creeper is reported to be moderate (Gilman 1999). Individual stems appear to live about 2 to 5 years, but the plants, being clonal, can go on indefinitely. Golden creeper is produced and sold in commercial nurseries. Plants in commercial production are produced by ground layering and rooted cuttings. Field planting of hormone-treated cuttings is also recommended (Centro Ecologico Sian Ka'an 2002). Wildlings (seedlings and plants dug up from natural stands) transplant well (Workman 1980). Recommended spacing for planting is 0.9 to 1.5 m (Gilman 1999). Once planted, golden creeper needs little attention (Workman 1980); in fact, it often dies if over-irrigated (Gilman 1999).

Benefits.—Golden creeper contributes to the biodiversity of the sites where it grows, stabilizes the soils in those fragile environments, and

provides food and cover for wildlife. It is planted as an ornamental for landscaping, usually as ground cover. Golden creeper is also used for beach dune stabilization. It is particularly promoted for water-restricted landscaping (Workman 1980). A tea is made from the leafy shoots as a treatment for coughs (Centro Ecologico Sian Ka'an 2002).

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