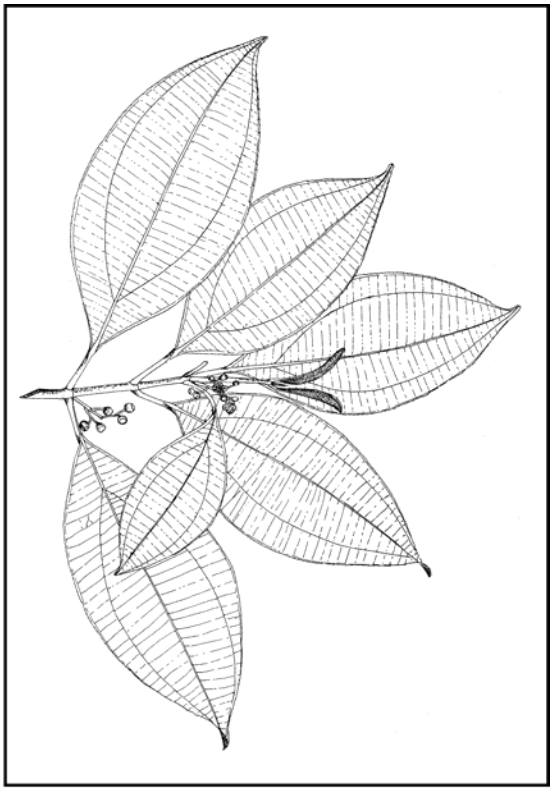
***Mecranium latifolium* (Cogn.) Skean** camasey almendro
MELASTOMATACEAE

Synonyms: *Mecranium amygdalinum* (Desr.) C. Wright ex Sauvalle
*Melastoma amygdalinum* Desr.



**General Description.—**Camasey almendro is a shrub or small tree sometimes reaching 7.5 m in height and 13 cm in stem diameter. The plant frequently has multiple stems arising near the base. Horizontal stems and branches produce vertical sprouts. Stems, which are covered with gray-brown, thin, slightly furrowed bark, tend to be straight with relatively few branches. Twigs are light green turning brown, slightly four-angled, and marked with half-round leaf scars. The wood is light tan, weak and brittle, and has a 2-mm pith. Plants are supported by a shallow system of dark tan, somewhat brittle roots. Opposite, light green leaves are elliptic to ovate, pointed at both ends, with the margin mostly finely serrate, and 5.4 to 15.4 cm long. There are three main veins, the two lateral ones arising 0.3 to 1.3 cm above the base of the blade. Small inflorescences (panicles) are axillary and bear several-to-many small, white, four-petaled flowers. The juicy fruits (berries) are globose, 5.5 mm in diameter, purplish black when mature, and have a slightly sweet and slightly bitter flavor. Within are many seeds that are light brown, tear-drop shaped, and about 0.5 mm long by 0.25 mm thick (author's observation, Liogier 1995, Little and others 1974).

**Range.—**Camasey almendro is native to the Luquillo Mountains and the Cordillera Central of Puerto Rico and to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands (Liogier 1995). DNA evidence indicates a likelihood that this species arose from *M. multiflorum* (Desr.) Triana or *M. septentrionale* Skean now found in the adjacent island of Hispaniola (McKenny 2002). The species is not known to have been planted or naturalized outside the native range.

**Ecology.—**Camasey almendro is widely distributed throughout the mountain forests in Puerto Rico from 300 m elevation upward (Little and others 1974) in areas that receive more than about 1800 mm of precipitation. Soils are usually clayey or loamy, developed from igneous and sedimentary rocks with pH's from about 5.0 to 6.0. Camasey almendro flowers and fruits in full sun and partial shade. It grows well in moderate shade but eventually succumbs to the heavy shade of a fully closed forest canopy. Apparently, at least mild disturbance is necessary for establishment. Such disturbance results naturally from hurricanes and other winds that cause tree-fall gaps, rarely from landslides, and more recently from road cuts and other construction. However, invasion is slow and never with large populations. Thirty years after a plane crash removed the elfin forest vegetation at 1,000 m elevation in the Luquillo Mountains of Puerto Rico, 0.1 percent of the stems of the resurgent vegetation was camasey almendro (Weaver 2000).

**Reproduction.—**Camasey almendro flowers and fruits throughout the year (Little and others 1974). The small fruits are produced in relatively large numbers, and each fruit contains a large number of seeds. A collection of fruits from Puerto Rico averaged 0.138 $\pm$ 0.005 g/fruit. The seeds are tiny; an air-dried sample averaged 25.4 million/kg. The

seeds can be cleaned by crushing, wet sieving with a fine mesh screen, filtering and drying on the paper filter, and rubbing the seed off the paper. Without pretreatment seeds took 4 months to begin germinating and completed 11 percent germination in 11 months. Germination is epigeal, and seedlings are about 1 mm across the two cotyledon leaves. It is assumed that birds eat the fruits and disperse the seeds. Seedlings are scattered to relatively common in suitable, disturbed habitat. Layering (rooting) occurs whenever horizontal stems come in contact with the ground. Camasey almendro sprouts when stems are broken or cut.

**Growth and Management.—**Camasey almendro grows moderately slowly and probably lives at least 2 or 3 decades. No planting or management experience has been published. Removal of the forest canopy and soil disturbance near seed sources would likely result in reproduction.

**Benefits.—**Camasey almendro helps protect the soil and furnishes food and cover for wildlife. It is an attractive plant and adds to the aesthetics of the forest. The species might be suitable as an ornamental in natural landscaping if it proves adaptable at lower elevations where the island urban centers are located.

**References**

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