

***Melochia nodiflora* Sw.**
STERCULIACEAE

malva colorada

Synonyms: *Mougeotia nodiflora* (Sw.) HBK.
Riedlea nodiflora (Sw.) DC.
Visenia nodiflora (Sw.) Spreng. in L.



General Description.—*Malva colorada*, also known as britónica prieta and mauve, is a medium-sized shrub to 3 m in height and 5 cm in stem basal diameter. The species forms a fairly robust tap and lateral root system. The species is herbaceous when small, becoming woody before the end of the first year. *Malva colorada* may have single or multiple stems that arise from the root crown and lateral roots and large lateral branches may form low on the stem. *Malva colorada* often develops only primary and secondary branches. The bark of older stems and branches is reddish brown. The leaves are alternate with petioles 0.5 to 3 cm long and ovate or ovate-lanceolate blades are 2.5 to 10 cm long and 1.2 to 6 cm broad. The tip is pointed, the margin serrate, and the veins prominent. The inflorescences are axillary in dense globose clusters in which are situated tiny, dark pink, pink, or white flowers. The inflorescences mature into clusters of reddish-brown capsules each of which contain, when completely filled, five 2-mm brown seeds (Grisebach 1864, Howard 1989, Liogier 1994).

Range.—*Malva colorada* is native to the Bahamas, the West Indies, and from Mexico through Brazil (Grisebach 1864, Howard 1989, Liogier 1994). The species is not known to have been planted or

naturalized outside its natural range.

Ecology.—*Malva colorada* grows on all types of well drained soils with medium or high fertility (Sánchez, and Uranga 1993) derived from sedimentary (including limestone), igneous, and metamorphic (including ultramafic) rocks. In Puerto Rico, it grows in areas that receive from 750 to about 2000 mm of mean annual precipitation. In dry areas, the species is confined to riparian zones. *Malva colorada* grows in Puerto Rico from near sea level to over 600 m in elevation. The species does not tolerate heavy shade and seems to require at least minor soil disturbance to become established. *Malva colorada* grows in old fields and neglected pastures, on roadsides and fencerows, along river flood planes and bars, and on neglected construction sites and vacant lots. It competes well with low grass and broadleaf weeds but does not grow under closed tree canopies.

Reproduction.—*Malva colorada* flowers over a 2 or 3 month period. After flowering, capsules take about 6 months to mature seeds. The species produces large quantities of seeds that are released during the dry season. They are small and are carried by wind, water, animals and agricultural equipment (Sánchez and Uranga 1993); no specialized means of dispersal is known. Seeds of *malva colorada* collected in Puerto Rico weighed an average of 0.00167 g/seed or 597,000 seeds/kg. Seeds with no pretreatment were placed to germinate on moist filter paper, and 36 percent germinated over an 11-month period. Germination is epigenous.

Growth and Management.—Individual stems live from 2 to about 4 years. Through suckers and coppices, plants can live several times longer. *Malva colorada* is sometimes a weed and is primarily a problem in perennial plantations such as citrus, pasture, coffee, and sugar cane (Sánchez and Uranga 1993). The species is controlled by mowing, cutting with machete, and by spraying with broadleaf weed killers.

Benefits.—*Malva colorada* is browsed by goats and to a limited extent by cattle. It protects against erosion in recently disturbed areas.

References

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John K. Francis, Research Forester, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, International Institute of Tropical Forestry, Jardín Botánico Sur, 1201 Calle Ceiba, San Juan, PR 00926-1119, in cooperation with the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, PR 00936-4984