***Parathesis crenulata* (Vent.) Hook. f.** rascagarganta
MYRSINACEAE

Synonyms: *Ardisia crenulata* Vent.

General Description.—Rascagarganta, also known as secagarganta, jalapón, and raisin marron, is a shrub or small tree 1 to 3 m (occasionally reaching 6 m) in height and 1 to 4 cm (occasionally to 7.5 cm) in trunk diameter. The common names in Spanish imply that it will make one's throat raspy or dry. The species, unless disturbed, has a single stem and is supported by a taproot and lateral roots that are orange-brown in color. Most of the branches arise from the main stem, often in whorls of three's or four's. The alternate, dark-green, 7- to 23-cm leaves are narrowly elliptic, pointed at both ends, and often have wavy-toothed edges. The small pink flowers are borne in large numbers in terminal panicles. The 6- to 8-mm fleshy fruits progress from green to pink to red to black as they ripen. Each fruit contains one seed (Howard 1989, Liogier 1995, Little and others 1974).

Range.—Rascagarganta is native to Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Martinique (Howard 1989, Liogier 1995, Little and others 1974). Some taxonomists suggest that *P. serrulata* (Sw.) Mez, of Cuba and Hispaniola is synonymous with *P. crenulata* (Howard 1989).

Ecology.—Rascagarganta grows in moist forests that receive from about 1500 mm to 2800 mm of annual precipitation. In the dry end of the precipitation range, it only occurs near streams and extra moist hollows. The species is found mainly on slightly- to moderately-acid soils with loamy to clayey texture. Although areas with both igneous and sedimentary rocks are colonized, it is most abundant in valleys in limestone formations. Rascagarganta grows from a little above sea level to 760 m in elevation (Little and others 1974). The species is shade tolerant and prefers to grow under closed forests with moderate to light understory vegetation. It sometimes forms its own understory canopy under which little vegetation grows. There appear to be few insect or disease problems in natural stands.

Reproduction.—Rascagarganta is reported to flower from May to July and fruits from July to December (Little and others 1974). Fruits are often present in quantity and are easy to pick. They may be cleaned by maceration and wet sieving. A collection of fruits from Puerto Rico weighed an average of 0.407 g/fruit. Air-dried seeds cleaned from that collection weighed an average of 0.054 g/seed or 18,000 seeds/kg. Sown in peat, 45 percent germinated between 48 and 104 days after sowing. Many seedlings died from damping-off; therefore, a looser germination medium than peat is recommended. Seedlings grew slowly in the nursery, reaching less than 10 cm in 6 months (author's observation). Birds disperse the seeds. Seedlings are relatively common and widespread near fruit-bearing stands.

Growth and Management.—Rascagarganta grows slowly and appears to live several decades. No management experience has been published. However, the best strategy for establishment of natural stands may be to maintain plantations or natural forest stands in moist areas for long periods with closed canopies and relatively clear understories to allow rascagarganta to build up.

Benefits.—Rascagarganta contributes to biodiversity, cover for wildlife, and protects the soil from erosion in the forests where it grows. Although not usually heavily used by wildlife, the fruits are produced in large quantity and are available after hurricanes when overstory fruits are scarce. The wood is hard, but due to its small size is useful mainly for stakes and fuel.

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