

Piptocoma antillana Urban
ASTERACEAE

Antilles velvetshrub

Synonyms: *Piptocoma rufescens* auct. non Cass.



General Description.—Antilles velvetshrub is an evergreen, narrow-crowned, upright shrub usually 1 to 2 m in height but sometimes reaching 4 m in height and 5 cm in basal diameter. Mature plants often have several stems arising from the root crown or low on the stem. Lower stems are furrowed and gray; branches are relatively few, slender, straight, and covered with gray bark. The pale yellow wood is of moderate density, moderately strong, and has a dark brown pith at the center of the stem. Plants are supported by flexible, weak roots covered by corky, brown bark. The species is easily recognized by the narrow leaves that are dark green above and bright white beneath. The narrowly elliptic to lanceolate leaves are 3 to 8 cm long and 0.5 to 2.5 cm broad and have petioles up to 5 mm long. Inflorescences are corymbs of numerous campanulate heads. The seeds are straw-colored achenes about 2 mm long,

tipped with a pappus about 4.5 mm long (author's observation, Liogier 1997).

Range.—Antilles velvetshrub is native to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Liogier 1997). Previous reports (Liogier and Martorell 1982) that it occurred in Hispaniola were based on misidentification of *P. rufescens* Cass. Antilles velvetshrub is not known to have been planted or naturalized outside its native range.

Ecology.—Antilles velvetshrub grows in coastal and upland sites from near sea level to 500 m or more in elevation. Mean annual rainfall varies from about 750 mm to 2000 mm. It is most common on ridges and hillsides of areas underlain with ultramafic rocks and limestone. Antilles velvetshrub is sometimes seen on road cuts and the center between the tracks of abandoned roads. Soils are excessively well or well drained, have pH's from about 5.5 to 7.7, and vary widely in texture and quantity of stones in the profile. Antilles velvetshrub is drought tolerant—leaves wilt but the plants usually do not defoliate. The species tolerates competition from shrubs, herbs, and a moderate amount of grass. It grows in openings or under partial shade of low basal-area forests and may be found in remnant stands and mid- to late-secondary forests. The species probably requires bare soil or small-scale disturbance to establish itself. Antilles velvetshrub occurs as scattered to occasional plants.

Reproduction.—Antilles velvetshrub blooms annually, apparently near the end of the wet season. Seeds were collected by the author in Puerto Rico in March (dry season). The air-dried seeds averaged 0.00046 g/seed or 2,150,000 seeds/kg. Placed on moist filter paper without pretreatment, 8 percent germinated between 11 and 14 days after sowing. Germination is epigeal. Seeds are dispersed by wind. Seed crops can be moderately abundant, but seedlings are uncommon.

Growth and Management.—Antilles velvetshrub grows 0.5 to 1.0 m per year. The stems do not live long—perhaps 2 to 5 years—but plants can renew themselves and live longer by sprouting from the

root crown. Planting and management experience have not been published. Because the species is not abundant or aggressive, control should not be necessary.

Benefits.—Antilles velvetshrub helps protect the soil, furnishes cover for wildlife, and adds to the aesthetics of the forest. If means of propagation can be developed, the species would be valuable for background and accent in naturalistic landscaping.

References

Liogier, H.A. 1997. Descriptive flora of Puerto Rico and adjacent islands. Vol. 5. Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, PR. 436 p.

Liogier, H.A. and L.F. Martorell. 1982. Flora of Puerto Rico and adjacent islands, a systematic synopsis. Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, PR. 342 p.

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