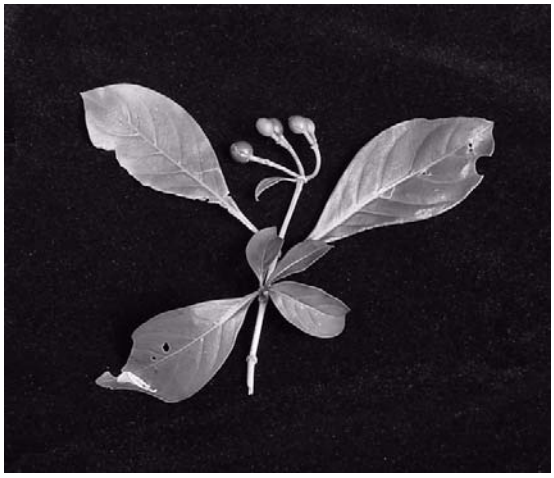
***Psychotria microdon* (DC.) Urban** thicket wild coffee
RUBIACEAE

Synonyms: *Psychotria pinularis* Sessé & Moc.
Rondeletia microdon DC.



General Description.—Thicket wild coffee, also known as café bâtard, and café marron, is a semideciduous arching or scrambling shrub 1 to 3 m in height with a basal diameter of up to 4 cm. There is usually a single stem from the ground in undisturbed plants with multiple branches low on the stem. The arching stems sometimes extend 2 or 3 m horizontally and tend to be very branchy. The wood is of medium density, moderately weak and brittle. Stem and branch bark is smooth and tan outside and green within. The plant is supported by a tap-and-lateral root system of dark tan and flexible roots. The foliar display is medium to thin. Membranous, glabrous, obovate to oblanceolate, light-green leaves are 4 to 11 cm long with 10- to 18-mm petioles. The inflorescences are terminal corymbiform cymes with three to five rays. The flowers have a five-toothed white corolla tube 5 to 10 mm long. Fruits are red or red-orange ellipsoidal berries about 7 mm long. They usually contain two tan seeds that are flattened on one side and rounded on the other (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997, Stevens and others 2001).

Range.—Thicket wild coffee is native to the Greater Antilles (except Jamaica), the Lesser Antilles, from Central Mexico south through Central America to Bolivia and eastwards to Guiana (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997, Stevens and others 2001). It is not known to have been planted or naturalized elsewhere.

Ecology.—Thicket wild coffee is occasional to relatively common in secondary and remnant forests from near sea level to 840 m (Stevens and others 2001). Mean annual precipitation for the species in Puerto Rico ranges from 750 to about 1700 mm. It grows on a variety of well-drained soils that developed from alluvium, and igneous and sedimentary (including limestone) rocks. Thicket wild coffee is moderately intolerant to intermediate in tolerance to shade. It will grow and fruit in openings and low basal-area stands and survives in forest stands with moderate basal areas. The species endures light grazing but disappears under heavy grazing pressure.

Reproduction.—In Nicaragua, thicket wild coffee flowers May through September and fruits August through September (Stevens and others 2001). Fruit and seed production is moderate. A collection of fresh fruits from Puerto Rico weighed an average of 0.259 $\pm$ 0.005 g/fruit. Air-dried seeds separated from them averaged 0.0187 $\pm$ 0.0004 g/seed or 53,000 seeds/kg. Sown without pretreatment on moist blotter paper, 78 percent germinated between 65 and 217 days after sowing. Germination is epigeal. The seeds are apparently dispersed primarily by birds. Tapirs eat the fruits, but the seeds are destroyed in the process (Olmos 1997). Seedlings are common near seed sources in Puerto Rico. Survival to adulthood is relatively rare, however.

Growth and Management.—Thicket wild coffee is slow growing as a new seedling and grows at a moderate rate as a sapling and adult. Plants survive at least 5 years and perhaps much longer. Planting and management experience has not been published. The species is not common enough or aggressive enough to warrant control.

Benefits.—Thicket wild coffee contributes to the biodiversity of forests, helps protect the soil, and furnishes food and cover for wildlife. The fruits are slightly sweet and edible but not highly desirable. The species is a larval host for the *Xylophanes pluto* (Fabricius) moth in Puerto Rico (Torres-Bauzá 2000).

References

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