

Psychotria nervosa Sw.
RUBIACEAE

shiny-leafed wild coffee

Synonyms: *Psychotria undata* Jacq.
Psychotria chimarrhoides DC.
Psychotria lanceolata Nutt.
Psychotria hirsuta Spreng.
Psychotria oligotricha DC.
Psychotria portoricensis DC.



General Description.—Shiny-leafed wild coffee, also known as wild coffee, Bahaman wild coffee, wood balsam, Seminole balsamo, café marrón, palo moro, ti café marron, ti kafé mawon, and remarooogu, is a 1- to 3-m erect shrub. Stem-like low branches are common, and multiple stems are formed in response to damage to the trunk. The stems, sometimes up to 7 cm in diameter, are covered with a bone-colored, smooth bark that is hairy in some variants. The plant is supported by stiff tap and lateral roots and abundant fine roots. Relatively few branches and twigs are formed with foliage maintained only near the tips. The leaves are shiny light or dark green, opposite, simple, glabrous or nearly so, elliptic to lanceolate, with

sunken veins and elongated tips. A large, flattened bud is almost always visible between the youngest pair of leaves. The flower clusters, which are terminal or axillary, are nearly globose and contain a number of small, white flowers. The clusters become more diffuse as the fruits mature. The fruits (drupes) are bright red, elliptic or globose at maturity and 6 to 7 mm long (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997, Nelson 1996, Stevens and other 2001). They are fleshy and juicy with little flavor. Each contains two seeds that have a rounded side with shallow striations and a flattened side with a division down the middle like a coffee bean (author's observation).

Range.—Shiny-leafed wild coffee is native to Florida, the West Indies, Southern Mexico, Central America, and Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela in South America (Liogier 1997, Stevens and others 2001).

Ecology.—Shiny-leafed wild coffee grows in dry and moist forests that receive from about 700 to 2000 mm of mean annual precipitation. At the moist end of the precipitation range, it tends to be found only on excessively drained sites. It is cold-sensitive, tolerating temperatures only to about freezing (Dolan 2002). It grows well above the frost line in Florida; presumably shiny-leafed wild coffee freezes to the ground and resprouts later. Well-drained soils with the range of textures and both igneous and sedimentary (especially limestone) parent materials are colonized. Wild coffee is moderately tolerant of shade, usually growing in the understories of low basal area forests. The shrub may also be found in natural and artificial openings. In Florida, it is usually found in shell ridges, hammocks, and pinelands (School of Forest Resources and Conservation 2002). Shiny-leafed wild coffee is occasionally found in pure clumps, but more often it grows as well-distributed plants.

Reproduction.—Shiny-leafed wild coffee blooms in spring and summer in Florida (Nelson 1996) and irregularly through the year in Nicaragua (Stevens and others 2001). The flowers are visited by honeybees and butterflies (Dave's Garden Network 2002) that presumably pollinate them. A collection of fruits from Puerto Rico weighed an average of 0.256 ± 0.009 g/fruit. Air-dried seeds from those fruits weighed an average of 0.0175 ± 0.0004 g/seed or 57,000 seeds/kg. About 85 percent of fruits from the collection contained two seeds; the remainder contained one filled seed and one aborted seed. Sown in commercial potting mix, 95 percent of the filled seeds germinated between 64 and 164 days after sowing (author's observation).

Growth and Management.—Shiny-leafed wild coffee has a moderate growth rate. Small wildlings and pruned larger plants transplant well. They also can be grown easily from seed. Once established in a garden or natural area, they will reproduce and eventually fill the area (Workman 1980). Where a seed source is available, probably the best strategy to promoting natural establishment is to manipulate the stand for an open understory.

Benefits.—Shiny-leafed wild coffee is a widespread and important understory plant in dry and moist forest and as such contributes to the biodiversity and biomass accumulation, and protects against soil erosion. It is frequently planted in Florida as a native landscape plant in both formal and natural gardens (Workman 1980). It is appreciated for its attractive foliage and bright red berries and because it attracts birds and butterflies (Dave's Garden Network 2002). The fruits are food for tapirs (Olmos 1997), a number of bird species (School of Natural Resources and Conservation 2002), and probably many other animals. Shiny-leafed wild coffee contains the alkaloid dimethyltryptamine, which is hallucinogenic (Ted 2002) and may eventually prove to have medicinal applications. The seeds were once used as a coffee substitute (Dave's Garden Network 2002).

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