

Vernonia albicaulis Pers.
ASTERACEAE

Santa María

Synonyms: *Vernonia vhliana* Less.
Vernonia thomae Benth.
Cacalia thomae (Benth.) Kuntze
Vernonia longifolia vahliana (Less.) Urban
Vernonia longifolia sintenisii Urban
Vernonia sintenisii (Urban) Gleason
Lepidaploa glabra (Willd.) H. Rob.



General Description.—Santa María, also known as tabac à jacot, is a shrub to 2 m tall and stem basal diameter to 1 cm. The ribbed, woody, gland-dotted, hairy stems are upright or arching. Several stems may arise from the root crown. The lateral root system has brown bark and a moderate amount of fine roots. The alternate leaves are evenly dispersed on the branches and have petioles 1 to 11 mm long. The blades are oblong to elliptic, rounded at the apex and pointed at the base, and have entire to weakly sinuate margins. Inflorescences are cymes of heads of 10 to 23 florets having lavender to white corollas 5 to 10 mm long. The fruits (achenes) are 3 mm long with pale brown to white pappus with bristles 0.5 to 1 mm long (Howard 1989, Liogier 1997).

Range.—Santa María is native to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Anguilla, St. Martin, St. Barts, Antigua, Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts, Monserrat, Guadeloupe, La Désidade, and Dominica (Howard 1989). A second subspecies, *longistylis* Keeley, a

taller and more robust plant, has been described on Guadeloupe (Howard 1989). Santa María is not known to have been planted or naturalized elsewhere.

Ecology.—Santa María is moderately intolerant to intermediate in tolerance of shade. It grows at forest edges, small openings, under low basal-area stands, and on difficult terrain with few trees. This may be in secondary or remnant forests. The species is most common in limestone areas from near sea level to 600 m elevation (Liogier 1997) but also occurs in terrain underlain by igneous rocks. Mean annual precipitation varies from about 900 to 2400 mm. The soils are well-drained, usually clayey or loamy, and have pH's from about 5.0 to 8.0.

Reproduction.—Seed production is abundant. A sample of seeds from Puerto Rico averaged 3.9 million per kg. They were sown on the surface of wet peat but failed to germinate. The seeds are dispersed by the wind. Seedlings are common to widely scattered.

Growth and Management.—Santa María has a moderate growth rate. Individual stems live about 2 to 4 years, and plants may live much longer by resprouting from the roots. No planting or management experience has been published. Because Santa María appears to benefit from disturbance to existing forest, thinnings and other silvicultural activities may help maintain it.

Benefits.— Santa María contributes to the diversity and beauty of the forest, helps protect the soil, and furnishes cover for wildlife.

References

Howard, R. A. 1989. Flora of the Lesser Antilles,

Leeward and Windward Islands. Vol. 6. Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, Jamaica Plain, MA. 658 p.

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

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