

LANTANA CAMARA L.

Verbenaceae/Vervain Family

Common Names:	Lantana, shrub verbena
Synonymy:	<i>Lantana aculeata</i> L.
Origin:	West Indies

Botanical Description: Rank-growing, multistemmed, deciduous shrub, to 2 m (6 ft) or more, with stems square, covered with bristly hairs when green, often armed as well with scattered small prickles. Leaves opposite, simple, with petioles to 2 cm (0.8 in) long; blades oval, rough hairy, to 15 cm (6 in) long and 6 cm (2.4 in) wide, with margins blunt-toothed and blade bases broad, squared off (truncate); leaves strongly aromatic. Flowers small, multicolored, in stalked, dense, flat-topped clusters to 4 cm (1.5 in) across; corolla a narrow tube with 4 short spreading lobes; flowers in a single cluster may be white to pink or lavender, yellow to orange or red, changing color over time. Fruit a round, fleshy, 2-seeded drupe, about 5 mm (0.2 in) wide, green turning purple then blue-black.

NOTE: May be confused with the endangered endemic native, Florida lantana (*Lantana depressa* Small), with which it has extensively hybridized, but bases of the native's leaf blades are tapered (cuneate), not truncate. Blade bases of the more common native, wild sage (*L. involucrata* L.), also cuneate, its flowers yellow-centered white, its leaves rounder.

Ecological Significance: A serious to common weed in 25 countries and present as a weed in another 22 countries (Holm *et al.* 1979). A serious, worldwide invader that in some areas has altered habitats and threatens to eliminate populations of native plants and animals (Cronk and Fuller 1995). Can become the dominant understory in open forests (Holm *et al.* 1977). In Florida, often forms thickets in sunny open areas; commonly invades disturbed sites such as roadsides, spoil islands, pastures, citrus groves, and cultivated woodlands. Also frequent in well-drained undisturbed habitats such as native pinelands, hammocks, and beach dunes. Reported from over 40 natural areas from Dade County to Okaloosa County (EPPC 1996). Widely promoted for ornamental cultivation since the early 1800s (Mack 1991), with wild plants in Florida representing tetraploid cultivars (Hammer 1997). Has extensively hybridized with all 3 distinct varieties of *L. depressa* (Sanders 1987), contaminating the endemic gene pool.



Immature and mature fruits

Distribution: Naturalized in tropical and warm regions worldwide (Sanders 1987). Found on the southern Atlantic Coastal Plain from Florida and Georgia to Texas (Small 1933), and in California and Hawaii as a serious pest (Holm *et al.* 1979, Kingsbury 1964). Common throughout Florida, including the Keys. Widely cultivated in Florida, with over 100 forms, cultivars, and hybrids available; some of the newer ones considered sterile (Hammer 1997).

Life History: Long recognized as highly toxic to grazing animals; has caused death in children when a quantity of unripe berries was eaten (Morton 1971b). Produces allelopathic substances in the roots and shoots, increasing its competitive ability (Smith 1985, Sahid and Sugau 1993). Strongly resists herbivory, contributing to its pest-plant status outside its natural range (Janzen *et al.* 1983). Can tolerate fire by regenerating from basal shoots (Smith 1985). Flowers year-round (or May to December in northernmost Florida). Seed dispersed by songbirds (Janzen *et al.* 1983). ‘Gold Mound’, ‘New Gold’, ‘Alba’, and ‘Patriot’ cultivars not known to produce viable seed in nursery or landscape plantings (S. Kent, Tree of Life Nursery, 1998 personal communication).



In Lake Jessup conservation area



Fruits and multicolored flowers