Ardisia crenata Sims



Common Name: Coral ardisia, coral berry, spice berry

Synonymy: *A. crenulata* Vent.

Origin: Japan to northern India

Botanical Description: Evergreen subshrub to 1.8 m (6 ft) tall (more commonly 0.5-1 m in height), growing in multi-stemmed clumps. Leaves alternate, to 21 cm (8.3 in) long, dark green above, waxy, glabrous, with crenate (scalloped) margins and calluses in the margin notches. Flowers white to pink in stalked axillary clusters, usually drooping below the foliage. Flowers small, bisexual, with petaloid parts pinkish white and anthers yellow. Fruit a bright red, globose, 1-seeded drupe, to 8 mm in diameter.

Ecological Significance: Introduced into Florida for ornament near the beginning of this century (Royal Palm Nurseries 1900). Noted as escaping into moist woods in 1982 (Wunderlin). Seen naturalized in hardwood hammocks across USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 9, including several areas in northern Florida (H. Dozier, University of Florida, personal observations). Recently reported as new to Texas flora, dominating understories in portions of two reserves (Singhurst et al. 1997). May reach densities of greater than 100 plants per m^2 (H. Dozier, University of Florida, unpublished data). Native plant species richness substantially lower in its presence, regardless of its density or the site history; also reduces the already dim light of forest understories by an additional 70%, potentially shading out native seedlings (H. Dozier, University of Florida, unpublished data). Mature naturalized plants usually surrounded by a carpet of seedlings, displacing small native ground cover such as violets, *Viola* spp., and wakerobins, *Trillium* spp., (M. Zeller and K. C. Burks, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, personal observations).

Distribution: Most widely distributed Ardisia worldwide (Watkins and Wolfe 1956, Watkins 1969). Naturalized on 2 islands in Hawaii (C. Smith, University of Hawaii, 1995 pers. comm.), and noted as an escapee in wet forest remnants in Mauritius over 60 years ago (Lorence and Sussman 1986; Vaughan and Wiehe 1937). In Florida, documented as invading scrub, sandhill, mesic flatwoods, hardwood hammocks, hydric hammocks, bottomland forests, maritime hammocks, lake shores, and ruderal communities. Documented by herbarium specimens in 21 counties as far west as Holmes County in the Panhandle south through central peninsula counties to Palm Beach County (Wunderlin and Hansen 2004). Reported in natural areas from Wakulla, Lake, Seminole, Putnam, Flagler, Hardee, St. Lucie, and Martin counties (FLEPPC 2005).

Life History: Prefers moist soil (Chabot 1952, Odenwald and Turner 1980), but may succumb to fungal rot in flooded soil (J. Tea, University of Florida, 1996 pers. comm.). Resprouts vigorously after cutting; propagated by cuttings for compact growth (Chabot 1952). Does not carry fire well through its thick foliage and resprouts following fire (F. E. Putz, University of Florida, 1996 pers. comm.). Produces fruit within 2 years from seed (Odenwald and Turner 1980). Fruit crop usually heavy, with viable seed retained year-round on plants (H. Dozier, University of Florida, personal observations). Seeds dispersed by birds, including mockingbirds and cedar waxwings (K. Brady, Birdsong Nature Center, 1997 pers. comm.) and by raccoons (H. Dozier, University of Florida, personal observations). Seeds able to germinate in a range of soil pH, from pH 4 (acid) to pH 10 (alkaline), with germination rates of 84 to 98% within 40 days (M. Zeller, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, unpublished data).