

ASCLEPIADACEAE

Perennial herbs, shrubs, lianas or small trees, usually with milky sap; leaves commonly opposite, rarely verticillate, simple and mostly with entire margins; inflorescences usually axillary, mostly cymose but the cymes usually umbelliform or racemiform; flowers from very small to medium sized, perfect, regular and of complicated structure; calyx tube short or none, the lobes imbricated or open in bud; corolla sympetalous, rotate, campanulate or urceolate, 5-lobate with the lobes valvate or contorted; a corona adnate to the corolla tube is usually present, simple or with 5 or more scales or lobes; stamens 5 inserted on the corolla, often very complicated and united to the stigma to form the gynostemium; pollen collected into masses called pollinia; ovary superior, usually with 2 carpels; fruits of 2 parallel or divaricate follicles, or only one; seeds compressed, generally bearing a tuft of long, white, silk-like hairs.

Cactus-like or succulent kinds are to be found in Africa and these are occasionally planted as ornamentals. The sap of most kinds is milky and sometimes sticky. The systematics of this family is difficult and needs revision. There are perhaps fewer than 100 genera and 2000 or fewer species worldwide, mostly in the tropics. The account of the family for the Flora of Guatemala, actually prepared by this author, shows nine native genera and one that is exotic. No others occur in Central America except perhaps as cultigens. The silky fiber of the seeds looks much like silk but is brittle and unsuited for textiles.

Cryptostegia grandiflora (Roxb.) R. Br.

Rubber vine. Planted occasionally as an ornamental. The latex yields a large amount of rubber and the plant has been exploited in the past for rubber. The plant produces seeds in abundance and these are wind-carried. Since the plant has a potential as a serious weed it perhaps should not be used as an ornamental.

Gonolobus edulis Hemsl. Biol. Cent. Am. Bot. 2: 331. 1882. *Vincetoxicum edule* Standl. Contr. U. S. Nat. Herb. 23: 1680. 1926.

Cuayote, guayote.

The tender fruits are cooked and eaten. They are quite good.

Gonolobus salvinii Hemsl. Biol. Cent. Am. Bot. 2: 334. 1882.

Cuchamper, sigumper.

The inner parts of the immature fruits may be eaten raw. The whole fruit may be eaten when cooked. I have seen fruits offered in the markets of Guatemala and El Salvador.

Gonolobus stenanthus (Standl.) Woodson, Ann. Mo. Bot. Gard. 28: 243. 1941. *Vincetoxicum stenanthum* Standl. Field Mus. Bot. 4: 255. 1929.

The young fruits are eaten and a sweet is made from them in Honduras.

Matelea ceratopetala (Donn.-Sm.) Woodson, l.c. 236. *Dictyanthus ceratopetalus* Donn.-Sm. Bot. Gaz. 18: 208. 1893.

Chanchitos, cochita, cuchampel, chununa, Corazón de loro, sombreros, sombreritos.

The young fruits of this and doubtless of other species of *Matelea* are cooked and eaten.

Sarcostemma clausum (Jacq.) R. & S. Syst. Veg. 4: 114. 1819. *Cynanchum clausum* Jacq. Select. Strip. Am 87. 1763.

Mata-tórsalo, bejuco de pescado, cuchamperito, flor de Castilla, dama de noche.

Often abundant along streams and in thickets from Mexico to Panama, in the West Indies and South America. The acrid sap from the crushed leaves is applied to the skin of cattle where the larvae of the screw-worms are located and is said to kill the larvae. The tough and flexible stems are used to string fish and as a substitute for twine.

BASELLACEAE

A small family of scandent herbs or suffruticose plants mostly of the American tropics and adjacent temperate regions. There are about 5 genera and as many as 20 species, *Ullucus tuberosus* Calda which is called ullucu or melloco, is a rather common root crop from southern Colombia and Peru. I do not

know that it has been introduced into Mexico and Central America but it might be valuable as a new root crop for the Guatemalan highlands.

Anredera vesicaria (Lam.) Gaertn. f. in Gaertn. Fruct. 3: 176. 1807.

Hiedra de monte, suelda con suelda.

An infusion made from the leaves is used in the Guatemalan highlands for shampooing the hair.

Basella rubra L. Sp. Pl. 272. 1753.

Espinaca.

The vine is said to have been cultivated along the wet coast of Honduras and the tender shoots cooked and used like spinach. Native Probably of India, the leaves and shoots used as a pot herb in tropical Asia.

BERBERIDACEAE

Unarmed shrubs or trees (ours); leaves persistent, coriaceous, alternate, odd-pinnate (ours), spinose-serrate; flowers perfect; inflorescences paniculate (ours), with many flowers; perianth lobes imbricate, usually in whorls of 3, rarely 2-4; anthers opening by valves or slits; ovary superior; fruit baccate, the berry 3-seeded.

A relatively small family with some ten genera and as many as 200 species. Most kinds are to be found in the north temperate regions but a few extend into the American tropics and the species of *Berberis* extend south to Chile. The Central American kinds are shrubs or small trees. The wood and the sap of all of them are yellow or yellowish. The fruits of the four species of *Mahonia* known in Central America may be edible although the plants are not common.

Mahonia paniculata Oerst. Vid. Med. Kjobenhavn 1856: 36. 1857.

Yema de huevo, anchix.

The bright yellow wood of this shrub or small tree provides a dye that is used to color sacks, rush mats and perhaps other things. Known only in Guatemala and Costa Rica.