

Identification and Control of Coral Ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*): A Potentially Toxic Plant¹

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Coral ardisia, also known as coral berry, spice berry, and scratchthroat, was introduced to Florida in the early 1900's for ornamental purposes (Figure 1). Since then, it has escaped cultivation, and it is found in hardwood hammocks and other moist, natural-wooded areas and grazing lands. Documented herbarium specimens, or preserved plants, have been collected from 43 counties in Florida (Wunderlin and Hansen 2024). Coral ardisia is considered invasive by the Florida Invasive Species Council (Category I) and the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-native Plants (FISC 2019; UF/IFAS 2018); it was added to the Florida Noxious Weed List in 2014. This publication provides information for the identification and management of coral ardisia that is important to owners and managers of grazinglands and natural areas.



Figure 1. Coral ardisia in a hardwood hammock.
Credits: Michael Meisenburg

Identification

Coral ardisia is an evergreen, sub-shrub that reaches heights of 1.5 to 6 feet. It tends to grow in multi-stemmed clumps. The alternate, waxy leaves are about 8 inches long, and they are dark green above. They are also hairless, with scalloped margins and calluses in the margin notches (Figure 2). Flowers are typically pink to white in stalked axillary clusters, usually drooping below the foliage (Figure 3). The fruit is bright red, globular, and one-seeded, measuring about 0.25 inches in diameter (Figure 4). Berries tend to persist on the plant nearly year-round, and white-berried populations also exist.

Toxicity

Although there is no published literature supporting the toxicity of coral ardisia to livestock, it is suspected that the berries and/or foliage are poisonous to livestock, pets, and humans. In 2001, 2007, 2012, and 2020, the plant was the suspected causal agent for cattle deaths in Florida.

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Figure 2. Coral ardisia leaves are waxy with a bright, shiny appearance. The leaves may contain substances that are toxic to cattle and other livestock.

Credits: Brent Sellers, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Coral ardisia has pink to white flowers in axillary stalks that tend to hang underneath the foliage.

Credits: Michael Meisenburg



Figure 4. Coral ardisia has bright red berries. It is thought that livestock died after consuming the berries in 2001 and 2007 in Florida.

Credits: Michael Meisenburg

Control

Coral ardisia can be suppressed by using foliar applications of 2.25% v/v (volume to volume) solution of triclopyr ester-containing products (Garlon 4 Ultra, Remedy Ultra, others), 3% triclopyr amine-containing products (Garlon 3A, others), 3.14% v/v triclopyr acid (Trycera), 5% v/v imazamox (Clearcast, Castaway, others), or 1% imazapic-containing products (Impose, Panoramic, Plateau) (Table 1). Research by Hutchinson et al. (2011) indicated that high volume foliar applications of triclopyr, imazapic, or a combination of these two active ingredients provided >90% control of mature plants. However, research by Cristan et al. (2019) indicates that two applications of low-volume foliar applications (<50 gallons per acre of spray solution) will be necessary to obtain >90% control of mature plants. Basal bark applications with an 18% v/v solution of Garlon 4 or Remedy Ultra in an oil carrier can also control the plant. Complete coverage is essential when using foliar applications. Product restrictions differ according to the application site; reading the label prior to application is extremely important to ensure that the particular product is labeled for your application site as well as to prevent over application of any of these herbicides. Regardless of the application method, retreatment will be necessary for complete control as there will typically be a new flush of seedlings following most treatments. For more information on basal bark applications, visit <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AG245> to read the EDIS publication entitled *Herbicide Application Techniques for Woody Plant Control*.

References and Further Reading

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Table 1. Control of mature and seedling coral ardisia with selected herbicides 12 months after a single foliar treatment (12 MAT1) or 12 months after sequential annual foliar treatments (12 MAT2). Adapted from Hutchinson et al. 2011 and Cristan et al. 2019.

Active ingredient	Trade names	Rate (% v/v)	Mature plant control (%)		Seedling control (%)	
			12 MAT1	12 MAT2	12 MAT1	12 MAT2
Triclopyr ester ¹	Garlon 4 Ultra, Remedy Ultra, others	2.25	68	95	73	94
Triclopyr amine ¹	Garlon 3A, others	3	32	72	57	58
Triclopyr acid ¹	Trycera	3.14	64	93	66	90
Imazapic ²	Impose, Panoramic, Plateau, others	1	99	-	93	-
Triclopyr amine + imazapic ²	Garlon 3 A + Plateau	3 + 1	99	-	96	-
Imazamox ¹	Clearcast, Castaway, Imzacast, others	2.5	41	79	56	77
Imazamox ¹		5.0	66	92	57	94
¹ Data adapted from Cristan et al. 2019.						
² Data adapted from Hutchinson et al. 2011.						