



## Laurel (*Cordia alliodora*)

Family: Boraginaceae

Other Common Names: Laurel

Description: A small or medium-sized tree, seldom more than 40 or 50 cm in trunk diameter. The trunk is smooth and light colored, and nearly but never quite straight, but unbranched until the upper parts. Leaves are oval, alternate, bunched on branches. Twigs have numerous circular lenticels. Both leaves and petioles are asperous to the touch, with small hairs. Smaller plants are characterized by swellings along the stems where the branches exit; 3-4 branches exit from a single swelling (ants of the genus *Azteca* inhabit the swollen stem node). Branches are not straight where they exit, but rather arch upward. In larger trees, this same pattern persists, but is not always very clear. Crowns of larger trees are small, rounded, with irregular and arching branches.

Flowers and fruits: Flowers are produced in larger masses above the leaves in February. They are conspicuously bright white at this time, but they fade to a dull brownish color through March and into April, as they go to seed. Individual flowers are small, white, with green stripes. The small fruits have one seed, and are frequently eaten by pigeons. Foliage in the crown becomes very thin during April and May, and the trees are completely leafless for a period until July.

Distribution: Common and widespread edge and roadside species, also fairly common in natural canopy openings in mature forest of Soberania and Barro Colorado. Not common on the Caribbean side, though. Very common along the Panama City-Gamboia road.

How to recognize: This species takes awhile to learn well. The leaves are not at all distinctive, having a typical, plain shape and arrangement. Most important in smaller plants is the branching pattern and the swollen stem nodes. Larger trees are easily recognized during February and March, when they are covered in dense white flower clusters. Later, when the crown is leafless, it can be recognized, since no other common species are leafless at the same time, and by the small, dense crown of twisting branches. In the latter half of the wet season, when this species has leaves and no flowers, it takes a good deal of experience to learn to recognize it as an adult (when the swollen stem nodes are not evident). Three other species of *Cordia* in the area (eg, *C. bicolor*) have a different leaf pattern and are not confused with *Cordia alliodora*.

Uses: Wood is good quality, easy to work, resistant to decay, frequently used in various kinds of construction. It is grown in plantations in both Central and South American, and seeds can be purchased from various forestry institution. Laurel is also widely used locally by campesinos for fence posts and carts.