TIBOUCHINA FAMILY
Melastomataceae

COMMON NAMES
English: bush currant, miconia, purple plague, velvet tree
Vietnam: cây micona

DESCRIPTION
Evergreen shrub or small tree [4–8 (–16) m tall]; young stems are green, four-angled and covered in tiny star-shaped hairs; stems become brown and rounded with age.

Leaves: Dark green above and bright purple below, hairless, simple, oval with pointed tips [17–40 (–100) cm long and 7–25 cm wide], margins entire or finely toothed, three-veined from base to tip of leaf; leaf stalks are 2–6 cm long.

Flowers: White or pinkish, small, held in large clusters (20–50 cm long) at end of branches.

Fruits: Berries (fleshy fruits that don't open at maturity), green turning bluish black or dark purple as they mature (about 6 mm across), containing 140–230 seeds.

ORIGIN
Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornament and in contaminated soil.

INVADES
Roadsides, disturbed land, plantations, forest edges/gaps, woodland edges/gaps, plantations, riverbanks and coastal areas.

IMPACTS
Areas invaded become totally transformed due to the creation of deep shade which few native species can tolerate (Meyer, 1994). This weed now covers over two-thirds of the island of Tahiti, forming dense monotypic stands, that have overwhelmed the native forests, where between 40 and 50 of the 107 species endemic to Tahiti are thought to be on the verge of extinction (Meyer and Florence, 1996). Between 70 and 100 native plant species, including 40–50 species endemic to French Polynesia, are estimated to be directly threatened by *M. calvescens* with significant knock-on impacts on endemic birds and other organisms (Meyer and Florence, 1996). The lack of ground cover under infestations also contributes to higher rates of soil erosion. Impacts have let to infestations being termed the 'green cancer' of Tahiti and the 'purple plague' of Hawaii.

Miconia calvescens DC.