

Peltogyne purpurea Pittier

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FABACEAE (BEAN FAMILY)

No synonyms

Aromo, morado, nazareno, nene, purple heart

Peltogyne purpurea grows in southern Pacific Costa Rica and in Panama.

Peltogyne purpurea is a very slow-growing, deciduous tree that reaches 35 to 40 m in height and 1 m d.b.h. The trunk is moderately buttressed, and the smooth bark is gray on the surface and pink in the inner layer. Leaves are alternative, stipulate, pinnate, and composed of a single pair of leaflets (occasionally three). The blade is elliptic-lanceolate, long acuminate, leathery, 5 to 8 cm long and 3 to 4 cm wide; the rachis has no terminal growth. The trees are briefly deciduous in late December or early January, the brown leaves being somewhat conspicuous before they fall. The new foliage appears almost immediately and the tree in this condition can be seen for many kilometers (Allen 1956). Found in very humid climates, the tree grows best in the hills or in areas with good soil drainage at elevations from 50 to 500 m. The tree grows in climates with an annual rainfall of 3500 to 5000 mm and average temperatures of 23 to 27 °C.

The wood is heavy (specific gravity is 0.83), difficult to dry, with a moderate twisting and some fissures, and difficult to work and preserve. However, it has a high durability. When dry, the sapwood is gray-yellow-brown, and the heartwood is a brilliant purple when exposed to light (Carpio 1992). The grains are intercrossed; texture is medium to fine; and dark-

color strips alternate on radian surfaces. The wood is used for agricultural tools, boats, general carpentry, interior and exterior construction, railway foundations, furniture, cabinetwork, paneling, inlays, flooring, dock fenders, veneer, and ornamental plates (Allen 1956, Carpio 1992). Some of the doors in the National Museum of Costa Rica are made of this fine wood.

Peltogyne purpurea produces small, white, fragrant flowers in subterminal panicles several times from early August through September; each crop of flowers lasts 3 days (Allen 1956). The fruit is a brown, flat, obliquely obovoid-oblong one-seeded pod about 5 cm long that matures in great abundance in early February. Vilchez (1997) studied the phenology of this species in an exploited forest of Peninsula de Osa, Costa Rica, in one of the regions where the tree is relatively abundant. He found that leaf flushing occurs primarily in March and April, after a period of intensive leaf fall (January and February). The tree flowers from May through August, with a peak in June. Mature fruits were observed from November throughout January.

Peltogyne purpurea, one of the most valuable timber trees in southern Costa Rica, is not artificially regenerated. Because timber is harvested only in primary forests, information about nursery practices and seedling care is nonexistent (Nichols and González 1991a, 1991b).

