

THE TAXONOMIC POSITION OF SULITIA (RUBIACEAE)

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SUMMARY

The monotypic genus *Sulitia* Merr. containing *S. obscurinervia* (Merr.) Ridsdale is transferred from the *Cinchoneae* to the *Gardenieae*.

During preliminary work on the delimitation of the tribe *Cinchoneae* in Asia and Malesia the genus *Sulitia* seemed to be a highly aberrant member of this tribe. Merrill compared his new genus with the American genera *Hillia*, *Cosimbuena*, and *Ravnia*.

The type collection has somewhat unusual characters: thick coriaceous leaves, fascicles, apparently axillary, leaf-opposed inflorescences subtended by persistent bracts, strongly imbricate corolla lobes, and reportedly an epiphytic habit. Superficially the general habit is suggestive of *Lucinaea*, placed in the tribe *Schraderiae* of the subfamily *Rubioideae*. However, imbricate or contorted corolla lobes are rare in this subfamily; they are known in *Hamelia*, *Hillia* and *Deppea*. Furthermore, no trace of raphides could be found in the plant tissues of *Sulitia*. Within the subfamily *Cinchonoideae* the tribe *Gardenieae* seemed to be a possible place for the genus, particularly considering the form and position of the inflorescence. After checking through many collections of various genera it was found that Merrill had already described the plant, from collections made in Luzon, under the name *Gardenia obscurinervia*. Finally a fruiting specimen was found, the first known to me, which matches the other collections in vegetative characters and clearly confirms the position of the genus in the tribe *Gardenieae*.

SULITIA Merr. (Tribe *Gardenieae*)

Sulitia Merr., Philipp. J. Sc. 29 (1926) 494. — Type species: *S. longiflora* Merr. — Monotypic
Sulitia obscurinervia (Merr.) Ridsd., comb. nov. — Fig. 1.

Gardenia obscurinervia Merr., Philipp. J. Sc. 11 (1916) Bot. 32; En. Philip. 3 (1923) 531. — Type: B. S. 23492 (K, L).
S. longiflora Merr., Philipp. J. Sc. 19 (1926) 494. — Type: F. B. 29445 (UC).

Epiphytic or scandent shrub or liana. Terminal vegetative bud conical. Stipules ovate-oblong, 10–15 mm long, somewhat membranaceous, semipersistent, on detaching leaving a prominent ridged inter- and intrapetiolar stipular scar. Leaves

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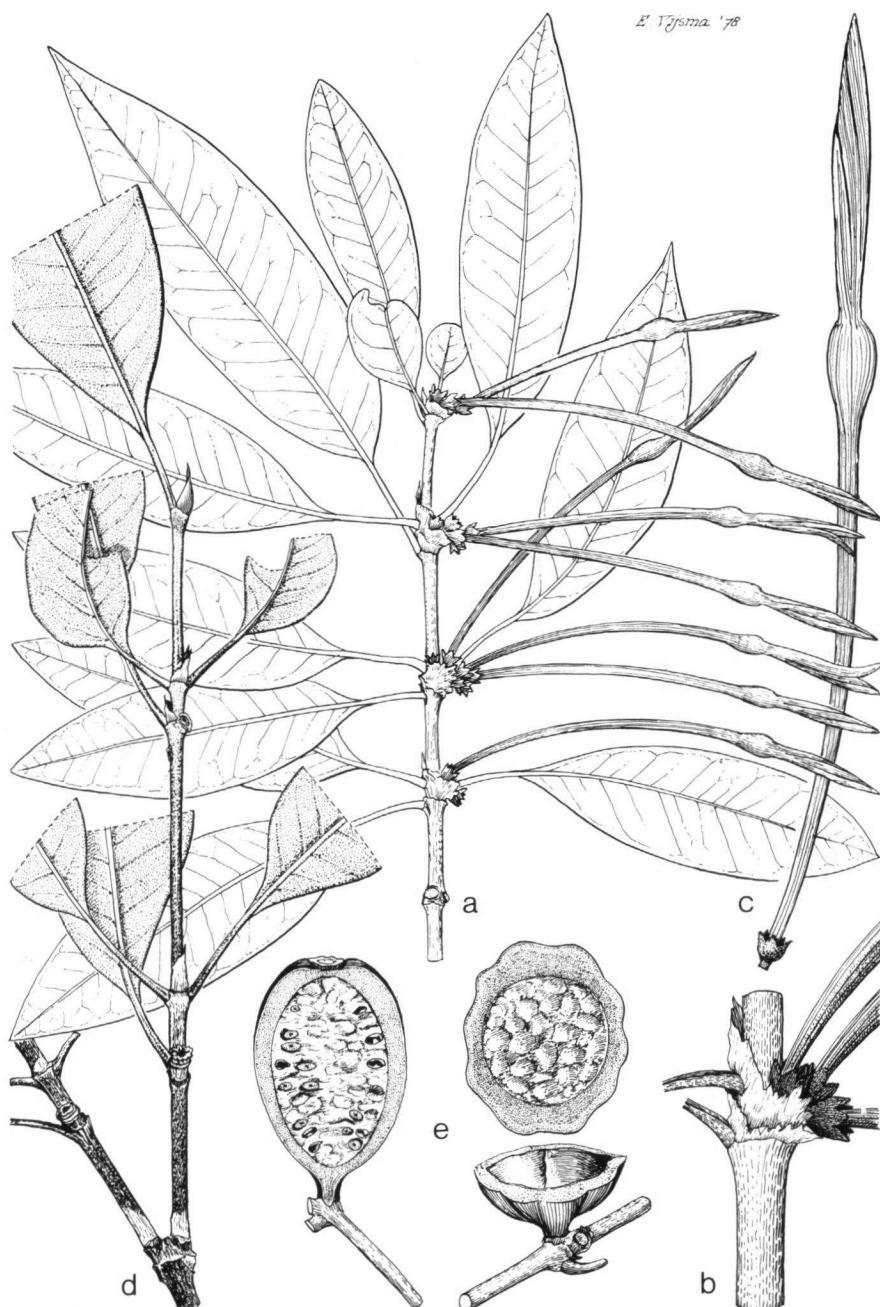


Fig. 1. *Sulitia obscurinervia*. — a. habit, $\times \frac{1}{2}$; b. detail of node, $\times 1$; c. flower bud, $\times 1$ (a-c: BS 23492); d. mode of branching and leaf-opposed scar of fruit, $\times \frac{1}{2}$; e. fruit, l.s., note disc, t.s. and basal portion, $\times \frac{1}{2}$ (d, e: Jacobs 7745).

elliptic-oblong to elliptic-lanceolate, (10–)12–18(–25) × 2.5–)3–5 cm, coriaceous, glabrous, drying colour olive to black; apex acute to acuminate; base acute, slightly decurrent, sometimes somewhat unequal; lateral nerves (10–)15–20 pairs, deeply immersed in the lamina, above slightly visable, below not visable. *Petiole* 2–3 cm long. *Inflorescence* a short, pseudo-axillary, leaf-opposed fascicle bearing numerous small, deltoid to ovate, membranaceous bracts. *Flowers* 3–6 per fascicle, white, fragrant, 5-merous. *Calyx* somewhat campanulate, 4–6 mm long; lobes deltoid to narrowly triangular, 2.5–3.5 mm long, margins ciliate. *Corolla* hypocrateriform, glabrous, tube 8–10(–11) cm long; lobes 30–40(–50) × 4–8 mm, strongly imbricate in the bud. *Disc* prominent. *Anthers* 10 mm long. *Style* slightly protruding from the throat, stigma clavate. *Ovary* 2-locular; placentas peltately attached to the septum, ovules numerous. *Fruit* ellipsoidal, 6–9 × 4–6 cm, orange, crowned by the remains of the disc; fruit wall 5–10 mm thick, with 9–10 shallow ridges, leathery, without a thickened endocarp; seeds numerous, surrounded by a red jelly.

Distribution: Philippines, Luzon (B.S. 23492; Jacobs 7745 – fruiting specimen distributed as *Randia* sp.); Mindanao (F.B. 29445; PNH 41907 – distributed as *Rubiaceae* *indet.* or *Lucinaea* sp.).

SYSTEMATIC POSITION

The fruit structure clearly places the genus in the *Gardenieae*. There is, as yet, no generic revision of the asiatic and malesian members of this tribe comparable to that accepted for Africa and hence it is difficult to asses the position of the genus. As Merrill has pointed out it does not closely resemble any known species of *Randia* or *Gardenia*. Ridged fruits occur in both *Gardenia* s.s. and *Randia* s.l.. *Sulitia* differs from the species generally accepted to belong to *Gardenia* s.s. in the lack of a fibrous endocarp, in the form and position of the inflorescences, and also in the lack of a mucilaginous exudate on the stipules. The inflorescence structure is reminiscent of *Randia* (*Aidia*) whilst the fruit is similar to that found in some species of *Randia* (*Rothmannia*). Pending a generic revision of this tribe I maintain it as a separate monotypic genus.