

Summary

Cratylia is a neotropical genus of recent origin that is naturally distributed to the south of the Amazon River Basin and to the east of the Andes, occupying parts of Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and northeastern Argentina. Of five species currently identified, *C. argentea*'s is more widespread in South America, and is found in Brazil, from the State of Pará to the states of Mato Grosso and Goiás (North-South direction) and from Peru to the State of Ceará (East-West direction). *Cratylia argentea* is a legume shrub that branches from the base of the stem; reaches 1.5 m-3 m in height; and is relatively new in forage evaluation systems. However, during the last

decade, *C. argentea* has been evaluated in several sites of the Latin America tropics with contrasting climatic and soil characteristics. It adapts well to subhumid climates, with a 5- to 6- month dry season, and to infertile acid soils with high aluminum content, located in tropical areas below 1200 masl. The highest dry matter (DM) production, however, has been observed in moist tropical conditions, in soils of medium fertility. Yields are related to plant age and planting density, and range from 14 to 20 t/ha per year. Plants have a high regrowth capacity during the dry season, as indicated by the fact that 30%-40% of total DM yield occurs during the dry season as a result of high leaf retention.

Cratylia argentea flowers and produces abundant, good-quality seed with low latency. To date, serious pest or disease problems have not been identified for *Cratylia*. The plant tissues that animals can use (leaves + fine stems) have a high protein content (19%-26%), with variable, intermediate digestibility (40%-55%) depending on plant maturity. Consumption of immature *C. argentea* forage is low when offered fresh, but consumption increases when immature forage is sun-dried or when mature forage (fresh or sun-dried) is offered. This increased consumption has been associated with a reduction in condensed tannins. Ruminants, fed poor-quality forage and receiving supplements of *Cratylia*, showed improved overall dietary intake, levels of ruminal ammonium, and N flow and absorption in the lower digestive tract; however, the basal diet was substituted and total dietary digestibility decreased. Dairy cows, grazing protein-deficient grasses, that were supplemented with *Cratylia* together with sugarcane, increased milk production (from 6.6 to 8.2 liters/cow per day) with increasing levels (0%-75%) of the legume in the supplement. The current use of this legume as protein supplement for dairy cows is now being evaluated within the research work conducted by the TROPILECHE Consortium, coordinated by CIAT and ILRI, in dual-purpose livestock exploitations in subhumid areas of Central America.