



Review

Wild *Manihot* species: botanical aspects, geographic distribution and economic value

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ABSTRACT. A total of 98 *Manihot* species have been recognized in the genus. All of them are native to the tropics of the New World, particularly Brazil and Mexico. The cultigen, *Manihot esculenta* Crantz (cassava), grows throughout the lowland tropics. Wild species vary in growth habit from acaulescent or short shrubs to tree-like. Because of their adaptations to different conditions, they are gene reservoirs for tackling many abiotic and biotic stresses such as improving root quality and resistance to diseases. They have been used successfully by the first author for improving protein content, seed-fertility, apomixis, resistance to mealy bug, and tolerance to drought. A table of the most important species from an economic viewpoint is presented.

Key words: Wild cassava; Natural habitat; Adaptation; Evolution