

*Acalypha wilkesiana*¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

This large, fast-growing evergreen shrub provides a continuous splash of color in the landscape. The bronze red to muted red 4- to 8-inch-long, heart-shaped leaves are available in varying mottled combinations of green, purple, yellow, orange, pink, or white, depending upon cultivar (Figure 1). These colors make copperleaf difficult to blend into the landscape. Two or three shrubs are usually sufficient for specimen or accent plantings. Be careful not to over-plant with copperleaf. Their unusual color attracts attention and they could look gaudy. The dense, much-branched growth habit creates a full shape, but plants occasionally need shaping to maintain a neat appearance. The upright growth of copperleaf can reach 10 to 15 feet in height, making it well-suited to use as an accent in mixed shrubbery borders. Upright and side branches eventually droop and the plant can spread to about 8 feet wide. The unusual, red, fuzzy, catkin-like flowers hang pendulously from leaf axils and are 8 to 12 inches long. It has been used as a hedge or screen planted on 3- to 5-foot centers.

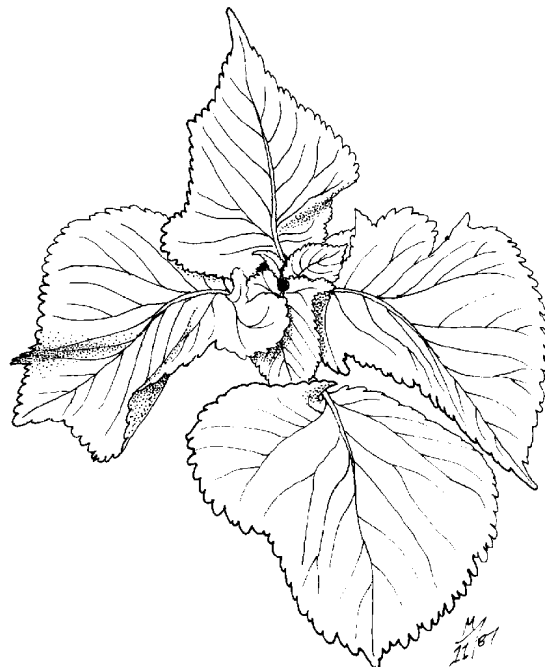


Figure 1. Copperleaf.

General Information

Scientific name: *Acalypha wilkesiana*

Pronunciation: ack-uh-LIFE-uh
 wilk-see-AY-nuh

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Common name(s): copperleaf, Jacob's coat

Growth rate: fast

Family: *Euphorbiaceae*

Texture: coarse

Plant type: shrub

Foliage

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Leaf type: simple

Origin: not native to North America

Leaf margin: dentate

Uses: hedge; border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; screen; accent

Leaf shape: reniform

Leaf venation: pinnate

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 8 to 12 feet

Spread: 6 to 8 feet

Plant habit: round; upright

Plant density: dense

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: purple or red; green; pink

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red

Flower characteristic: summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; acidic; sand; loam; occasionally wet

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice, persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Copperleaf grows easily in full sun in frost-free locations. The plant branches less in partial shade. While tolerant of drought, it looks best when provided with regular waterings during drought conditions. It will grow in a wide variety of garden soils.

A few of the available cultivars include: 'Godseffiana,' green leaves with creamy-white margins; 'Macafeeana,' leaves red, marked crimson and bronze; 'Macrophylla,' russet-brown leaves; 'Marginata,' leaves margined with crimson or some other color; 'Miltoniana,' oblong, somewhat drooping leaves with irregularly cut, white margins; 'Musaica,' green leaves with orange and red markings; 'Obovata,' bronzy-green leaves with rosy-pink margins.

Copperleaf is easily propagated by air-layers or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

Aphids, mites, and scales are problems on copperleaf plants.