Psychotria nervosa Wild Coffee¹
Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction
Psychotria nervosa is a Florida native shrub that gets its common name from the small, red, ellipsoid fruit it produces (Fig. 1). Fruit resembles the true coffee bean. The leaves of this plant are generally 6 inches long and are narrowly obovate in shape. These glossy green leaves are puckered with impressed veins on the upper surfaces of the leaf blades, and there is pubescence along the veins on the leaf undersides. The shiny, dark green foliage gives a rich texture to any landscape. The small, white inflorescence occurs terminally on the branchlets during the warm months of the year. Each flower is a sessile or stalked, open, short cyme.

Figure 1. Wild coffee

General Information
Scientific name: Psychotria nervosa
Pronunciation: sye-koe-TREE-yuh ner-VOE-suh
Common name(s): wild coffee
Family: Rubiaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: specimen; hedge; espalier; foundation; border; mass planting
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description
Height: 4 to 10 feet
Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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**Plant habit:** round  
**Plant density:** moderate  
**Growth rate:** moderate  
**Texture:** medium

### Foliage
- **Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite  
- **Leaf type:** simple  
- **Leaf margin:** entire  
- **Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval)  
- **Leaf venation:** pinnate  
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
- **Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches  
- **Leaf color:** green  
- **Fall color:** no fall color change  
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower
- **Flower color:** white  
- **Flower characteristic:** spring flowering; summer flowering

### Fruit
- **Fruit shape:** oval  
- **Fruit length:** less than .5 inch  
- **Fruit cover:** fleshy  
- **Fruit color:** red  
- **Fruit characteristic:** attracts birds

### Trunk and Branches
- **Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy  
- **Current year stem/twig color:** green  
- **Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

### Culture
- **Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun; plant grows in the shade  
- **Soil tolerances:** acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay  
- **Drought tolerance:** moderate  
- **Soil salt tolerances:** poor  
- **Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

### Other
- **Roots:** usually not a problem  
- **Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
- **Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding  
- **Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive  
- **Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

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**Use and Management**

This 4- to 10-foot-tall plant may be used in the landscape as a specimen or foundation plant and is very effective when planted in mass. It stays relatively small in the sun and takes to clipping quite nicely. It makes a nice base or background plant for a shrub border. Birds and other wildlife are often associated with this plant for the fruit it produces.

Wild coffee is a moderately drought tolerant plant that will perform well in a partial shade or full shade location in the landscape. Plants in the full sun often have chlorotic foliage. A plant in the full shade can grow into a small tree with an open canopy. It is very cold tender and should be protected if grown north of hardiness zone 10b. This plant will grow on any well-drained soil.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.