

Acalypha hispida: Chenille Plant¹

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<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

This document is a part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman.

Introduction

Chenille plant is a vigorous, upright, coarse-textured shrub with a height of 4 to 6 feet (Figure 1). Older specimens can grow taller with some support. The stems are heavily foliated with 6- to 8-inch-long ovate medium-green leaves (Figure 2). The showy red flowers of chenille plant are attractive and droop in cattail-like, narrow pendent clusters up to 18 inches in length (Figure 3). Chenille plant flowers year-round, with peak flowering season during the summer. This plant is dioecious—only the female plant produces the notable flowers; however, the plants grown and available in the horticultural trade are all female.



Figure 2. Leaf—*Acalypha hispida*: chenille plant.
Credit: UF/IFAS



Figure 1. Full Form—*Acalypha hispida*: chenille plant.
Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Flower—*Acalypha hispida*: chenille plant.
Credit: Keighly Graves, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Acalypha hispida*

Pronunciation: ack-uh-LIFE-uh HISS-pid-uh

Common name(s): chenille plant; foxtail; red-hot cattail

Family: *Euphorbiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11B (Figures 4 and 5)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

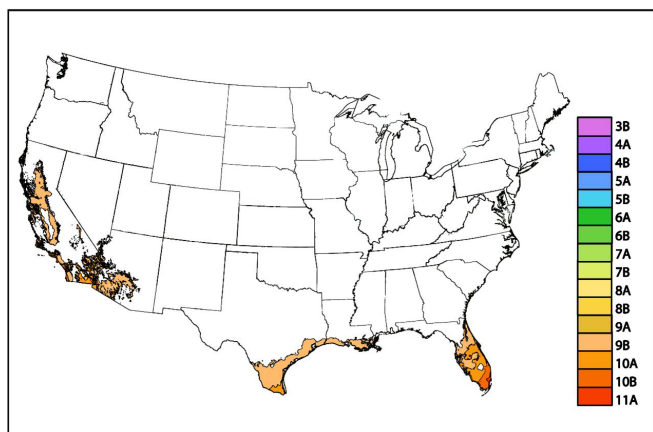


Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within USDA planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

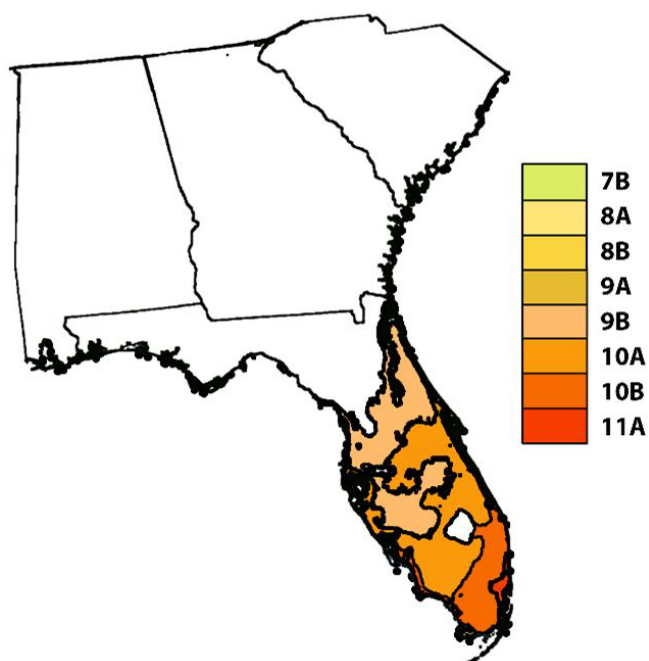


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B–11A; 11B within USDA planting zone but not pictured on map.
Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 9B: year-round

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: hedge; specimen; foundation; border; mass planting; accent

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet

Spread: 6 to 8 feet

Plant habit: upright; spreading

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate; arcuate

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: red

Flower characteristic: year-round flowering; showy long drooping red blooms; up to 18" in length

Fruit

Fruit shape: no fruit

Fruit length: no fruit

Fruit cover: no fruit

Fruit color: no fruit

Fruit characteristic: no fruit

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 full sun; plant grows in partial shade

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form and winter flowers

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

Use and Management

The chenille plant is a beautiful flowering shrub that is commonly used as an accent, hedge, specimen, or container plant. Its long period of bloom makes it a showy centerpiece for any tropical or subtropical garden. It is well suited for a container planting near a deck or patio.

This plant performs well in many types of well-drained landscape soils. It grows and flowers best in full sun, with little care other than irrigation needed to maintain the plant once it is established. After the plant finishes flowering, pruning may be needed to keep it to the desired size.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Design Considerations

The long red flowers of the chenille plant are a striking feature that can be used to bring color to a shrub border. Red shows best in full sun when paired with other shrubs with white and pink flowers to make the red look more intense. Shrubs with dark green glossy leaves would also contrast well with the leaves of the chenille plant. Foreground plants could include purple and white flowers and fine or medium textures such as narrow strap blades in a clumping form, or tall spiky forms with narrow leaves.

Pests and Diseases

Scales, mites, whitefly, and aphids may be troublesome pests in some landscapes, especially when the plants are grown in partial shade. No diseases of major concern.

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