

# *Acalypha pendula* Dwarf Chenille Plant<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

This ground-hugging, fine-textured relative of the more common chenille plant grows no more than several inches tall. In the full sun it forms a thick canopy of tiny, serrated leaves no more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches long by  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide. Bright red, fussy flowers stand erect above the foliage like soldiers in a field.



Figure 1. Full form—*Acalypha pendula*: dwarf chenille plant.  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Acalypha pendula*

**Pronunciation:** ack-uh-LIFE-uh PEN-dyoo-luh

**Common name(s):** dwarf chenille plant

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae

**Plant type:** ground cover

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10 through 11 (Figure 4)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** hanging basket; ground cover; cascading down a wall

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



Figure 2. Leaf—*Acalypha pendula*: dwarf chenille plant.  
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Figure 3. Flower—*Acalypha pendula*: dwarf chenille plant.  
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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant, Environmental Horticulture Department; and Gail Hansen, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 0 to ½ feet  
**Spread:** depends upon supporting structure  
**Plant habit:** spreading  
**Plant density:** dense  
**Growth rate:** slow  
**Texture:** fine

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** opposite/subopposite  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** serrate  
**Leaf shape:** ovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** less than 2 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** red  
**Flower characteristic:** year-round flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** unknown  
**Fruit length:** unknown  
**Fruit cover:** unknown  
**Fruit color:** unknown  
**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not applicable  
**Current year stem/twig color:** green  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thin

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun  
**Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam  
**Drought tolerance:** moderate  
**Soil salt tolerance:** unknown  
**Plant spacing:** 18 to 24 inches

## Other

**Roots:** not applicable  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Well suited for a hanging basket, dwarf chenille plant will cascade nicely over a wall if planted close to the edge on top of the wall. This plant makes a good ground cover provided people are kept off of it. Like ivy, it tolerates foot traffic poorly. The small stature and slow growth make it a nice addition to a rock garden or other small-scale landscape design.

Dwarf chenille plant performs well in many types of well-drained soils. It grows and flowers best in full sun, with little care other than occasional irrigation needed to maintain the plant once it is established.

## Design Considerations

The short red upright flowers of the chenille plant are a striking feature that can be used to bring color to a ground cover edge. Red shows best in full or part sun when paired with other small shrubs or groundcover with white and pink flowers to make the red look more intense. Groundcover with larger dark green, glossy leaves would also contrast well with the leaves of the chenille plant. Background plants could include purple and white flowers and fine or medium textures such as grasses with narrow strap blades in a clumping form or tall spiky forms with narrow leaves.

## Pests and Diseases

There are no diseases of major concern associated with dwarf chenille plants. Scales, mites and aphids may be troublesome pests in some landscapes, especially when plants are grown in partial shade.