

Acalypha amentacea subsp. wilkesiana: Copperleaf¹

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen²

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. 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.

General Information

Scientific name: Acalypha amentacea subsp. wilkesiana

Pronunciation: ack-uh-LIFE-uh a-ment-AY-see-ee subspecies wilk-see-AY-nuh

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



Figure 1. Leaf—Acalypha amentacea subsp. wilkesiana: copperleaf. Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

Family: Euphorbiaceae

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not considered a problem species at this time and may be recommended by UF/IFAS faculty (reassess in 10 years)

Uses: hedge; border; mass planting; container or aboveground planter; screen; accent

- 1. This document is FPS 6, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised November 2017 and June 2022. Visit the EDIS website at https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication.
- 2. Edward F. Gilman, professor; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant; and Gail Hansen, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

Availablity: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

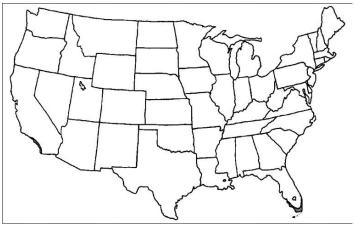


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 8 to 12 feet

Spread: 6 to 8 feet

Plant habit: round; upright

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: dentate

Leaf shape: reniform

Leaf venation: pinnate

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

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 watering 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.

Design Considerations

The intense colors of the copperleaf foliage make a striking display in the landscape so it should be used with care. One to three plants carefully located for a dramatic focal point is the best use of the plant. Red shows best in full or part sun and would pair well with shrubs with medium green or dark green foliage. Small shrubs and groundcover plants with large dark green, glossy leaves would also contrast well with the foliage of the copperleaf plant. Pair with plants with simple forms, but contrasting texture such as mounding grasses with narrow strap blades or clumping form with wide-blade smooth foliage that is common on many tropical plants.

Pests and Diseases

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