

# *Acalypha amentacea* subsp. *wilkesiana*: Copperleaf<sup>1</sup>

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## 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 above-ground planter; screen; accent

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor; Ryan W. Klein, graduate assistant; and Gail Hansen, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

**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

**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 mound-ing 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.