

Psychotria nervosa Wild Coffee¹

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Introduction

Psychotria nervosa is a Florida native shrub that gets its common name from the small, red, ellipsoid fruit it produces. 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. Full Form - *Psychotria nervosa*: Wild Coffee
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf and Flower - *Psychotria nervosa*: Wild Coffee
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Figure 3. Fruit - *Psychotria nervosa*: Wild Coffee
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General Information

Scientific name: *Psychotria nervosa*

Pronunciation: sye-koe-TREE-yuh ner-VOE-suh

Common name(s): wild coffee, Seminole balsamo

Family: *Rubiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

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

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 4 to 10 feet

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

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 0.5 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

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

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.