Acalypha wilkesiana
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Introduction

This large, fast-growing, evergreen shrub provides a continuous splash of color in the landscape with the bronze red to muted red, 4 to 8-inch-long, heart-shaped leaves available in varying mottled combinations of green, purple, yellow, orange, pink, or white, depending upon cultivar (Fig. 1). These colors make Copper-Leaf difficult to blend into the landscape and two or three shrubs are usually sufficient for specimen or accent plantings. Be careful not to over-plant with Copper-Leaf since 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 Copper-Leaf 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 wilkesiana
Pronunciation: ak-uh-LIFE-uh wilk-see-AY-nuh
Common name(s): Copperleaf, Jacob’s Coat
Family: Euphorbiaceae
Plant type: shrub
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America

Uses: hedge; border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; screen; accent
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 8 to 12 feet
Spread: 6 to 8 feet

Figure 1. Copperleaf.
Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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:**  
- **Soil salt tolerances:** unknown  
- **Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

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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

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

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

Use and Management

Copper-Leaf grows easily in full sun in frost-free locations. Grow this more open and the plant branches less in partial shade. While tolerant of drought, it looks its best when provided with regular waterings during drought and will grow on a wide variety of garden soils.

A few of the available cultivars include: ‘Godseffiana’, green leaves with creamy-white margins; ‘Macafeana’, 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.

Copper-Leaf is easily propagated by air-layers or cuttings.

Aphids, mites, and scales.

Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.