



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Acalypha wilkesiana*¹

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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: ack-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

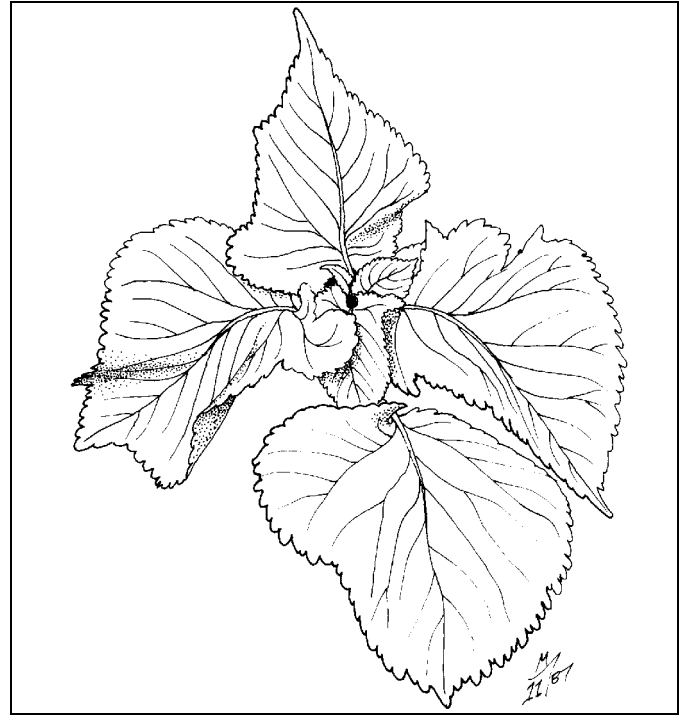


Figure 1. Copperleaf.

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

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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

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; '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.

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

Aphids, mites, and scales.

Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.