Colubrina arborescens 1
Edward F. Gilman

Introduction

Native to south Florida in the coastal upland plant community and the Caribbean Basin, this small tree or large shrub can reach a height of 20 feet or more (Fig. 1). Handsome, shiny leaves are borne on thin twigs covered with rust-colored hairs. Hairs occasionally extend onto the underside of leaves. Prominent yellow veins contrast with the dark green leaves. Plants grow in dense clusters in sunny or partially shaded locations.

General Information

Scientific name: Colubrina arborescens
Pronunciation: kawl-yoo-BRYE-nuh ar-bor-RESS-enz
Common name(s): Coffee Colubrina, Wild Coffee
Family: Rhamnaceae
Plant type: tree
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 1)
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: container or above-ground planter; reclamation plant; trained as a standard; hedge; near a deck or patio; specimen; espalier; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; border
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 15 to 25 feet
Spread: 12 to 20 feet
Plant habit: round; oval
Plant density: dense
Growth rate: slow
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow
Flower characteristic: year-round flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: fleshy

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**Colubrina arborescens** -- Coffee Colubrina

**Figure 1.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Fruit color:** black  
**Fruit characteristic:** attracts birds

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
**Current year stem/twig color:** brown  
**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun  
**Soil tolerances:** occasionally wet; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay;  
**Drought tolerance:** high  
**Soil salt tolerances:** good  
**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**

**Roots:** usually not a problem  
**Winter interest:** no special winter interest  
**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive  
**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**

Colubrina makes a good hedge or screen planting due to the dense canopy. Plant on 5 feet centers to establish a solid mass of foliage several years after planting. Single plants can be trained into a small tree by periodically removing lower foliage and branches as the tree grows taller. It will make a nice ornamental next to the patio or deck since the foliage is pretty and the fruit is small. Small fruit also make this plant suitable for planting near a swimming pool.

Soil in its native habitat is well drained and sandy, usually with a slightly alkaline pH. In the Keys, plants grow in porous limestone.
Colubrina elliptica is a similar plant growing in the Florida Keys and the Caribbean Basin. Colubrina cubensis is an endangered plant in Florida. The fruit pops open to disburse the seeds. This gives the plant its common name of Soldierwood.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases should cause problems with this plant.