Hibiscus coccineus

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Introduction

The Scarlet Rose Mallow is a narrow, upright, herbaceous perennial that can reach a height of 4 to 8 feet (Fig. 1). The 5- to 6-inch-long leaves of this plant are palmately lobed into 3, 5, or 7 parts. These finger-like lobes are slender and have jagged teeth along their margins. Deep red flowers that are 5 to 6 inches wide appear in mid to late summer. These flowers are funnelform and occur on long axillary peduncles. There are 10 or more involucral bracts present on the flower. They are curved upward and are much shorter then the calyx lobes.

General Information

Scientific name: Hibiscus coccineus
Pronunciation: hye-BISS-kus kock-SIN-ee-us
Common name(s): Swamp-Mallow
Family: Malvaceae
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 10 (Fig. 2)
Planting month for zone 8: year round
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: accent; border; mass planting; attracts butterflies; attracts hummingbirds
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 4 to 8 feet
Spread: 3 to 4 feet
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: open
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine

Figure 1. Swamp-Mallow.
Hibiscus coccineus  -- Swamp-Mallow

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: lobed; serrate  
Leaf shape: star-shaped  
Leaf venation: palmate  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous  
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no fall color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
Current year stem/twig color: reddish  
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun  
Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; sand; loam; clay;  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Soil salt tolerances: poor  
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable  
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:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

## Use and Management

The Scarlet Rose Mallow is frequently used as a specimen and can be placed in a border. It may also be utilized around the edge of a pond or along a stream since this type site is similar to their native Georgia and Florida habitat.

Although the Scarlet Rose Mallow is native to wetland areas it is tolerant of somewhat drier soils. This plant requires a full sun or partial shade location in the landscape. Flowering and growth in the shade are poor.

Cultivars include: ‘Lord Baltimore’, deep red flowers.

*Hibiscus coccineus* can be propagated by seed or division.

### Pests and Diseases

The Scarlet Rose Mallow may be occasionally bothered by a stalk borer. Grasshoppers also enjoy chewing the foliage and flower buds. This can spoil the flower display. Be prepared to provide control for this pest. I usually squash them between my hands in the evening as a means of mechanical control.