



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Psychotria nervosa*¹

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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 (Fig. 1). 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.

General Information

Scientific name: *Psychotria nervosa*

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

Common name(s): Wild-Coffee

Family: *Rubiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: native to Florida

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

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 1. Wild-Coffee.

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Description

Height: 4 to 10 feet

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-494, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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 .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

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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.