

Copperleaf Adds a Little Shine to the Landscape!

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'Blaze' dwarf copperleaf and a variegated manihot.



One of the green with white frilled margins and blotches, maybe 'Sunset Hue' or 'Godseffiana'.



'Mardi Gras' copperleaf. (Photo from Black Olive East Nursery (Andy 078).



'Bourbon Street' (or possibly 'Marginata Bronze') at Naples Botanical Gardens (above) and possibly 'Macrophylla' in Petite Riviere, Haiti (below).



Copperleaf (*Acalypha wilkesiana*) is native to Fiji and other nearby Islands in the South Pacific. I really enjoy the mass plantings of the various varieties of copperleaf glowing in the medians and along the Vineyards Boulevard. This plant is an old time Florida favorite that is being used more often with the development of new varieties. Some people are starting to kind of shift away from the formal, high maintenance, boxed hedges that became so popular in the last few decades. Hence, we are seeing more shrubby looking plants becoming more popular, such as crotons, which are in the same family, Euphorbiaceae, as copperleaf. These colorful plants can be used as a small group of three to highlight a blah boxed hedge or in a landscape bed or as a massive informal Key West looking hedge.

The Betrock PlantFinder wholesale guide lists 26 cultivars of copperleaf. Some of these may be the same variety with different cultivar names. Speaking with one nursery person, she said it wasn't uncommon for nurseries to nickname a sport or slightly different variation so in-house staff could separate the different looking plant. Even Pamela Crawford (Best Garden Color for Florida) has a misnamed variety on page 114.

This plant isn't grown for its flowers, which are obscure four to eight inch catkins. Another name for this plant is Joseph's coat and the leaves tell the story all season long. The leaves vary in length from three to eight inches or more. Some general colors and forms are: broadly ovate, such as Godseffiana (green and white mix, with white edges) and Macrophylla (mix of dark and bright reds) to strap-shaped leaves with Mardi Gras or Cypress Elf (which may be the same cultivar); twisty leaves such as Irish Petticoat and Ceylon (both with green white edging) or Haleakala (dark maroon with deep serrations). There are many varieties with pinks and coppery browns and all shades in between.

Varieties vary in height and some make a thicker hedge than others. Haleakala is a bean pole form, it doesn't seem to bush out even with pruning. Cypress Elf and Blaze are low growing forms (3 to 5 feet). Others grow to about 8 to 15 feet. They look fuller when they are pruned back annually and woody cuttings readily root so you can have more plants fairly soon.

This species may require extra moisture until it is established, but afterwards they are drought tolerant, although they look more flamboyant with a little extra water and fertilizer. It will take filtered shade or for brighter colors, place it in full sun. Do not plant in a windy location nor near areas where the salty sea breezes blow. They have no serious pests, but keep an eye out for mealybugs, mites and scale insects. Copperleaf is less cold tolerant than crotons, but will rebound if nipped back by a frost. It is considered a USDA Zone 10 and 11. Although some varieties are grown in central Florida, Zone 9a.

For a view of several copperleaf varieties see: <http://www.kartuz.com/> and search for *Acalypha*. Make sure you see the plants before you buy as the varietal names are not reliable and vary from location to location, unfortunately.



'Haleakala' has a dark maroon twisty leaf with deep serrations(left). *'Irish Petticoat'*(right) has semi-circular, slightly twisted dark green leaves with a strikingly clean, white margin.



These two varieties of copperleaf show the dramatic difference in texture, size and color at Mount's Botanical Garden in West Palm Beach, Fl. (P.S. Still looking for the ID tag with names of these varieties!)

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