

# Wild coffee

(*Psychotria nervosa*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_botanical\\_terms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms).

Wild coffee is an evergreen shrub that occurs naturally in coastal, hydric, mesic and rockland hammocks throughout Florida's peninsula. Its flowers typically bloom in spring and summer, but may bloom year-round. They are attractive to a variety of pollinators, especially *Atala* and *Schaus'* swallowtail butterflies. The plant's fruits are a favorite of many birds and small wildlife. Humans can eat the berries as well, but they are rather bland. Unlike its cousin, *Coffea arabica*, from which our morning cup of joe is derived, Wild coffee fruit contains no caffeine. The seeds can be roasted and used as a caffeine-free coffee substitute, but do so with caution as some sources suggest the brew may induce a headache.



Photo by Keith Bradley

Wild coffee's many white to greenish-white flowers are small and tubular with four- or five-lobed calyces. They are born in sessile clusters that may be axillary or terminal. Its leaves are dark green, glossy and obovate to elliptic with pointed apices, deep veination and entire margins. They are oppositely arranged. Stems are glabrous. Fruits are oval drupes that turn bright red when ripe.

The genus *Psychotria* comes from the Greek *psyché*, which means "life" or "soul." It may refer to the medicinal properties of some plants within the genus. The species epithet *nervosa* is from the Latin *nervosus*, meaning "sinewy," and likely refers to the plant's conspicuous veination.

**Family:** Rubiaceae (Coffee, bedstraw or madder family)

**Native range:** Peninsular Florida into the Keys

To see where natural populations of Wild coffee have been vouchered, visit [www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu](http://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu).

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Moderately dry to moist, well-drained sandy, loamy or calcareous soils

**Exposure:** Partial to full shade

**Growth habit:** 1–8' tall with 1–5' spread; shorter in Central and North Florida

**Propagation:** Cuttings, seed

**Florida regions of landscape suitability:** North (peninsular), Central, South

**Garden tips:** Wild coffee's beautiful evergreen foliage and low maintenance requirements make it a popular choice for many Florida landscapes. It can be used as a specimen or accent plant, although several planted together can form a loose understory or mass along shady edges. It is relatively salt tolerant and somewhat drought tolerant, but does not do well when exposed to too much sun or freezing temperatures. Wild coffee will produce more flowers and fruit in a partially shady site.

Wild coffee is available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit [www.PlantRealFlorida.org](http://www.PlantRealFlorida.org) to find a nursery in your area.

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