

# Marlberry

(*Ardisia escallonioides*)

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

Marlberry is an evergreen shrub or tree found in coastal strands and hammocks and pine rocklands throughout Central and South Florida. It blooms and fruits intermittently throughout the year, with peak blooming summer through fall. Marlberry's abundant fruit is enjoyed by birds and small animals and is also edible to humans. Its dense foliage provides significant cover for wildlife.



Photo by Ryan Fessenden

Its fragrant flowers may be creamy white or pinkish, have distinct yellow anthers, and are born in dense terminal or axillary panicles. The plant's thick, glossy, dark green leaves are lanceolate to elliptic and tend to reflex upward. They are petiolate and alternately arranged. Leaf margins are entire. Bark is smooth, thin and whitish-gray. Fruits begin as small green to reddish drupes that turn shiny and black when mature. Each fruit bears a single hard seed.

The genus name *Ardisia* is from the Greek *árdis*, or "point of an arrow," and may refer to the flowers' anthers or corolla lobes. The species epithet *escallonioides* is derived from the genus *Escallonia* (named after the 18th century Spanish botanist Antonio Escallón y Flórez) and the Greek *eídos*, meaning "resemblance" or "likeness."

**Family:** Myrsinaceae (myrtle or eucalyptus family)

**Native range:** Peninsula from Flagler, Pasco and Polk counties south into the Keys

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

**Lifespan:** Perennial

**Soil:** Dry to moist, well-drained organic, sandy or calcareous soils

**Exposure:** Full sun to partial shade

**Growth habit:** 3–18'+ tall (tallest in southern climes)

**Propagation:** Seed

**Florida regions of landscape suitability:** Central, South

**Garden tips:** Marlberry is often overlooked as a landscape plant, but this shrub to small tree is both attractive and versatile. It works well as both a specimen plant and when used as a hedge or buffer, as it can easily be pruned or trimmed to maintain a desired shape or size. The plant is salt- and drought-tolerant and will grow in sunny and shady landscapes.

**Caution:** Marlberry may be confused with its non-native cousins, Coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*) and Shoebutton ardisia (*Ardisia elliptica*). Coral ardisia is differentiated from Marlberry by its crenately toothed leaf margins and bright red berries. Shoebutton ardisia's flowers are larger than Marlberry's and pinkish-purple. Both are Category I invasives that are known to displace native species and alter natural communities. If present, they should be removed and destroyed.

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

SCAN FOR FULL  
PLANT PROFILE:



FLORIDA  
Wildflower  
FOUNDATION

Florida Wildflower Foundation • P O Box 941691, Maitland, FL 32794-1691 • 407-622-1606 • [www.FlaWildflowers.org](http://www.FlaWildflowers.org)

