

Wild lime

(*Zanthoxylum fagara*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Wild lime is an evergreen shrub to small tree that occurs naturally in hammocks throughout Central and South Florida. It blooms year-round, with peak flowering in winter and spring. Its dense foliage provides cover, and its fruit provides food for birds and small wildlife. The plant is a larval host for several butterflies, including the Giant swallowtail and Schaus' swallowtail butterflies.



Photo by Ryan Fessenden

Wild lime flowers are tiny, yellow to yellowish-green, and born in clusters that emerge from the leaf axils. Leaves are pinnately compound with a winged midrib. They are alternately arranged. Leaflets are shiny, short (1–2 inches long) and obovate with crenate margins. Fruits are round, yellowish-green and mature into a dark brown husk that splits to reveal one to two shiny black seeds. The plant's trunk and branches are armed with hooked thorns. Bark is scaly.

Despite its common name, Wild lime is merely a cousin of culinary limes and other citrus fruit. It is also known as Lime prickly ash, although it is not related to other ash trees. Wild lime flowers and crushed leaves smell like lime. The leaves and bark can be ground into a powder and used as a bitter spice.

The genus *Zanthoxylum* comes from the Greek *xanthos*, or "yellow," and *xylon*, or "wood." It refers to a yellow dye made from the roots of some *Zanthoxylum* species.

Family: Rutaceae (Rue or citrus family)

Native range: Peninsula from Marion county south to the Keys

To see where natural populations of Wild lime have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moist to very dry, well-drained sandy, loamy or calcareous soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 5–20'+ tall, 3–10' wide

Propagation: Seed

Florida regions of landscape suitability: Central, South

Garden tips: Wild lime, with its dense foliage and thorny branches, is a great choice for establishing a buffer or privacy screen. It can be pruned and maintained as a hedge. The plant can tolerate partial shade, but when grown in full sun, it produces a fuller crown and many more blooms. Wild lime is great for both formal and naturalistic landscapes. It is easy to establish, adaptable to a variety of conditions, and grows fairly quickly.

Wild lime is available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.

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