

Chiococca alba: Snowberry¹

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This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a document series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit <https://FloridaFriendlyLandscaping.com> to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.

Introduction

Snowberry (*Chiococca alba*) is a vinelike to clambering shrub with a sprawling growth form (Figure 1). This plant can reach a height and spread of 6 to 10 feet, if given support to climb upon. The leathery leaves of snowberry are evergreen, shiny, and dark green in color (Figure 2). White to yellowish tubular flowers are found in the leaf axil and occur in 3-inch-long racemes or panicles (Figure 3). Each panicle is tipped with 6 to 8 of the flowers, which turn from white to yellow over time. The common name used for this shrub refers to the large, ovoid, white fruits that follow the flowers (Figure 4). Snowberry is a larval host plant for the endangered Miami blue butterfly (*Cyclargus thomasi bethunebakeri*) and the berries are attractive to birds. This plant may be used as a mounding specimen and is an attractive trellis or espalier subject. It may also be used in habitat restoration and more naturalistic landscapes, as snowberry tends to have an aggressive, sprawling growth habit. This Florida native plant is both drought and salt tolerant, and may also be used in coastal landscaping or restoration.



Figure 1. Full form—*Chiococca alba*: snowberry.
Credit: © Chris Kirby-Lambert, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Chiococca alba*: snowberry.
Credit: © Corey Callaghan, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Chiococca alba*: snowberry.
Credit: © laurengriffith, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Fruit—*Chiococca alba*: snowberry.
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General Information

Scientific name: *Chiococca alba*

Pronunciation: kye-oh-KOE-kuh AL-buh

Common name(s): snowberry, milkberry, West Indian milkberry

Family: *Rubiaceae*

Plant type: sprawling shrub; vine

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

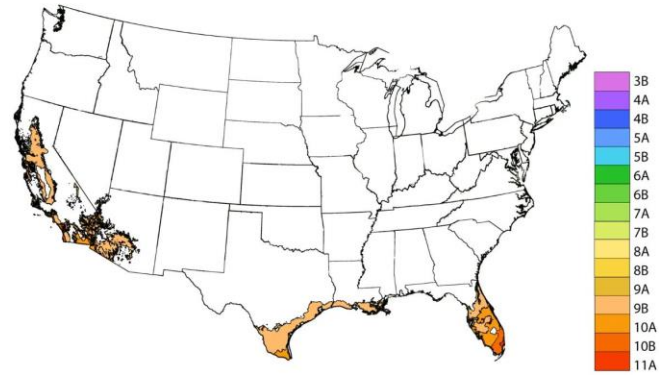


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 9B to 11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zones 9B-11A

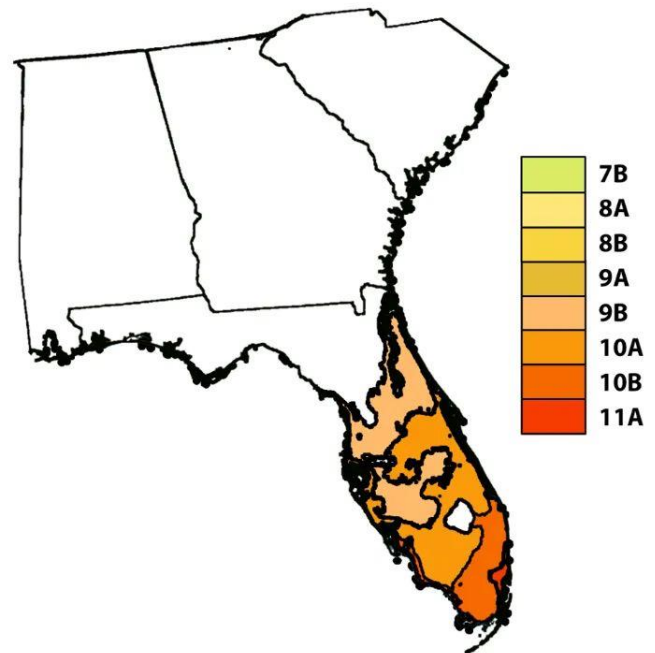


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 9A to 11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: native to Florida

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: espalier; mass planting; foundation; habitat restoration; veils a trellis

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 6 to 10 feet

Spread: 6 to 10 feet

Plant habit: spreading; round

Plant density: open

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year; showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: white

Fruit characteristic: attracts birds; showy

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: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in partial sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: evergreen foliage

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Snowberry should be located in partial shade in a well-drained soil. It will grow well on sandy loam soils and can tolerate dry conditions. Snowberry is native to coastal areas throughout north, central, and south Florida. It is found in coastal hammocks and flats, pine flatland ecosystems, and disturbed sites near these areas. This plant is generally found at native plant nurseries.

Design Considerations

Snowberry provides delicate white flowers followed by distinctive white berries that attract birds, while its semi-vining, sprawling habit and small, bright green leaves create loose, naturalistic texture and informal screening. Thriving in partial shade to full sun and adapting to various soil conditions from moist to dry, it works best in naturalized borders, woodland edges, wildlife gardens, or as an understory planting beneath canopy trees where it can ramble freely; avoid formal settings where its loose growth requires frequent pruning. Plant in well-draining soil with regular moisture and pair with other wildlife attracting plants like firebush (*Hamelia patens*), wild coffee (*Psycotria nervosa*) and coontie (*Zamia integrifolia*); combine with ferns and wild ginger for understory layering, use grasses like Fakahatchee (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) for structural contrast, and complement with flowering trees like redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) or dogwood (*Cornus* spp.) to create habitat corridors that support birds and butterflies while maintaining a natural, low-maintenance garden aesthetic.

Pests and Diseases

Minor pest issues include chewing insects. No diseases of major concern.

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