

***Coffea arabica*: Coffee¹**

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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

Arabian coffee is an economically important plant to many countries as it produces the coffee beans used in coffee production. This plant is native to countries in Africa but is cultivated in many countries in South and Central America, Southeast Asia, and Hawaii. It is a medium-textured, dense, upright shrub with a height and spread of 6 to 15 feet (Figure 1). Coffee has evergreen glossy, wavy edged, unusually dark green leaves, which have a whorled leaf arrangement on the stem (Figure 2). The showy flowers are fragrant, white, starry-shaped, and appear in the spring and summer. Flowers are arranged in clusters at the nodes (Figure 3). Following the flowers, green berries that contain two seeds gradually turn red once mature (Figure 4). These two seeds, or coffee beans contained within the showy fruit, are suitable for home roasting and grinding. Along with the edible aspect of this plant, coffee may also be used as a specimen plant, is suitable in containers or above-ground planters, makes a good hedge or border in the garden, or may be used as an espalier.



Figure 1. Full form—*Coffea arabica*: coffee.

Credit: © marzipan2, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Coffea arabica*: coffee.

Credit: © Uriel Levy, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Coffea arabica*: coffee.

Credit: © marzipan2, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Fruit—*Coffea arabica*: coffee.

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General Information

Scientific name: *Coffea arabica*

Pronunciation: KOFF-ee-uh uh-RAB-bick-uh

Common name(s): coffee; Arabian coffee; coffee plant

Family: *Rubiaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11B (Figures 5 and 6)

USDA Hardiness Zones 10A-11A



Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 10A–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 10A-11A

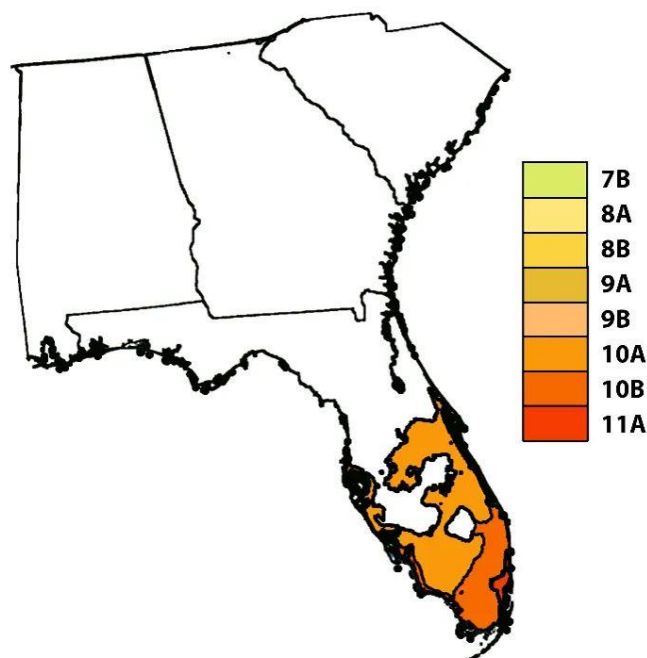


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 10A–11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

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 zones 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: fruit; specimen; container or above-ground planter; hedge; near a deck or patio; espalier; border

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

Description

Height: 6 to 15 feet

Spread: 6 to 15 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: whorled

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering; showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval

Fruit length: less than 0.5 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant; suited for human consumption; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in partial shade

Soil tolerances: acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: evergreen leaves and fruit provide winter interest

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Coffee should be planted in a location with partial shade, and in a moist soil rich in organic matter. Soil should have consistent moisture, but not be overwatered, as this leads to root rot. Regular pruning can keep the plant attractive at any desirable size. This shrub is suitable for containers, specimen plantings, or used as a small understory tree in hammocks and wild wooded areas. It also makes a nice backdrop in a shrub border. It may also be used as a houseplant, if maintained at a shorter stature and placed in bright indirect light and high humidity. Coffee takes 3 to 4 years after establishment to produce flowers and fruit.

Propagation is by seed.

Design Considerations

Coffea arabica offers glossy, deep green evergreen foliage and a tidy, upright form that adds refined texture and year-round color to shaded plantings. It performs best as a specimen in courtyards or patios, a foundation plant on protected east or north-facing exposures, or a midlayer backdrop in tropical beds; it also works well in containers where its foliage and seasonal berries can be appreciated up close. It pairs well with other shade-loving plants, such as ferns for textural contrast or bromeliads (*Aechmea* spp., *Billbergia* spp., *Guzmania* spp.) and caladiums (*Caladium bicolor* and hybrids) to add a splash of color beneath its leaves.

Pests and Diseases

Pest issues include scales, mites, thrips, and caterpillars.

Disease issues may include coffee leaf rust. Coffee plants are susceptible to mineral deficiencies and root rot from overwatering.

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