

## ***Colubrina arborescens*: Coffee Colubrina, Wild Coffee<sup>1</sup>**

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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**

*Colubrina* (*Colubrina arborescens*) is a large shrub to small tree with an upright growth form, native to south Florida in the coastal upland plant community and the Caribbean Basin. This plant reaches a height of 15 to 25 feet, and a spread of 15 to 20 feet (Figure 1). The evergreen foliage is glossy and borne on thin twigs covered with rust-colored hairs (Figure 2). Hairs occasionally extend onto the underside of leaves. Prominent yellow veins contrast with the dark green leaves. *Colubrina* produces inconspicuous star-shaped green flowers in clusters at the leaf axils (Figure 3). These flowers appear year-round but are most abundant in late summer. Fruits are rounded black capsules and are attractive to birds (Figure 4). *Colubrina* has a variety of uses in the landscape including as a reclamation plant, may be trained as a standard or hedge, used as a specimen, as an espalier, for small parking lot islands, as a lawn tree or border in the landscape.



Figure 1. Full form—*Colubrina arborescens*: Colubrina.  
Credit: © Ann Stafford, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Colubrina arborescens*: Colubrina.  
Credit: © Juan Gabriel, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 3. Flower—*Colubrina arborescens*: Colubrina.

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



Figure 4. Fruit—*Colubrina arborescens*: Colubrina.

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## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Colubrina arborescens*

**Pronunciation:** kawl-yoo-BRYE-nuh ar-bor-RESS-enz

**Common name(s):** Colubrina, coffee colubrina, wild coffee, greenheart, soap bush

**Family:** *Rhamnaceae*

**Plant type:** tree

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

## USDA Hardiness Zones 10A-11A

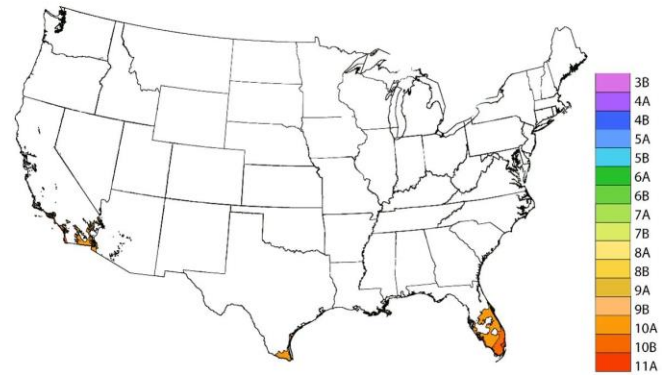


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 10A to 11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

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 10A-11A

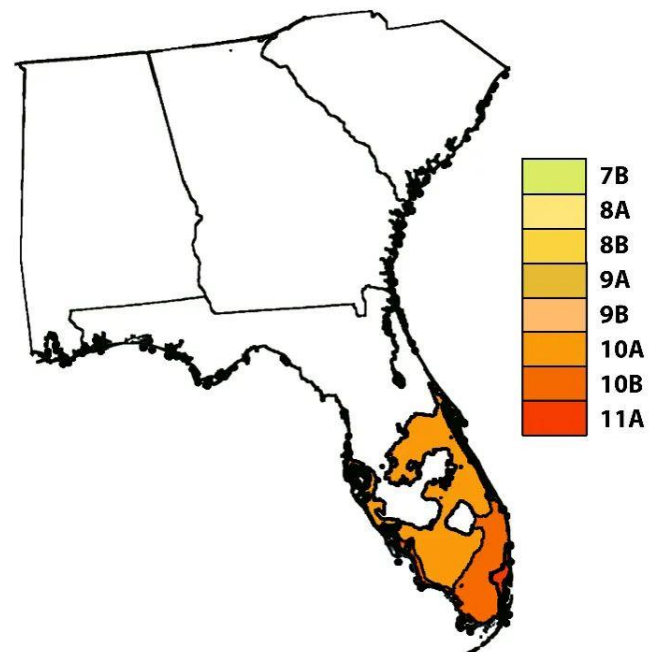


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 10A to 11A; 11B within planting zone but not pictured on map.

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 zones 10 and 11:** year-round

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** reclamation plant; trained as a standard; hedge; near a deck or patio; specimen; espalier; small parking lot

islands (< 100 square feet in size); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); wide tree lawns (> 6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; border

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

## Description

**Height:** 15 to 25 feet

**Spread:** 12 to 20 feet

**Plant habit:** round; oval

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**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:** year-round flowering; inconspicuous

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** round

**Fruit length:** less than 0.5 inch

**Fruit cover:** fleshy

**Fruit color:** black

**Fruit characteristic:** attracts birds

## Trunk and Branches

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

**Current year stem/twig color:** brown

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in partial shade; plant grows in the shade

**Soil tolerances:** occasionally wet; acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay

**Drought tolerance:** high

**Soil salt tolerances:** good

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** evergreen foliage

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

## Use and Management

Colubrina makes a good hedge or screen planting due to the dense canopy. Plant on 5-foot centers to establish a solid mass of foliage several years after planting. Single plants can be trained into a small tree by periodically removing lower foliage and branches as the tree grows taller. It will make a nice ornamental next to the patio or deck—or may also be located near a swimming pool—because of its attractive foliage and small fruits.

Columbrina grows best in partial shade but may also be planted in full shade. Soil in its native habitat is well drained and sandy, usually with a slightly alkaline pH. In the Keys, plants grow in porous limestone. Colubrina is adaptable to a range of soil conditions, given that it is well drained. It will benefit from a hummus or organic material in the top layer.

*Colubrina elliptica* is a similar plant growing in the Florida Keys and the Caribbean Basin. *Colubrina cubensis* is an endangered plant in Florida.

## Design Considerations

Colubrina offers glossy, deep-green foliage, a rounded to upright form, and clusters of small white flowers followed by red-to-black berries, providing year-round texture,

subtle color, and strong habitat value in partial shade to sun. Its adaptable structure makes it effective as a specimen in naturalistic or coastal gardens, a foundation shrub on protected exposures, a loose hedge, or a midlayer element in mixed native borders. Pair with other resilient plants such as firebush (*Hamelia patens*), Simpson's stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*), and cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*) for a layered shrub border, or plant

it with coontie (*Hamelia patens*) and beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) at its base under the canopy of larger trees like gumbo limbo to create a cohesive, low-maintenance habitat.

## Pests and Diseases

No pest or disease issues of major concern.

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