



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Erythrina herbacea*¹

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Introduction

Erythrina herbacea is a shrub that may attain a height of 20 feet but is often smaller (Fig. 1). It rarely exceeds a height of 8 feet in the northern and central sections of Florida. The Coral Bean has compound leaves that are semi-deciduous, and these 6- to 8-inch-long leaves are composed of three shallow-lobed leaflets. The leaves are light to medium green in color and have prickles on their midribs; the prickles are found on the underside of the leaflet. The stems of this plant are also armed with short, recurved spines. In south Florida, slender, multiple trunks that are covered with pale, thick bark are formed. Scarlet, tubular flowers are borne in 2-foot-long terminal racemes that can be enjoyed from April to June. These flowers are attractive to hummingbirds. The showy fruits of the Coral Bean are drooping pods that are constricted between the seeds. These pods split in the fall to reveal the beautiful, scarlet seeds.

General Information

Scientific name: *Erythrina herbacea*

Pronunciation: air-rith-RYE-nuh hur-BAY-see-uh

Common name(s): Coral-Bean, Cardinal-Spear, Cherokee-Bean

Family: *Leguminosae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

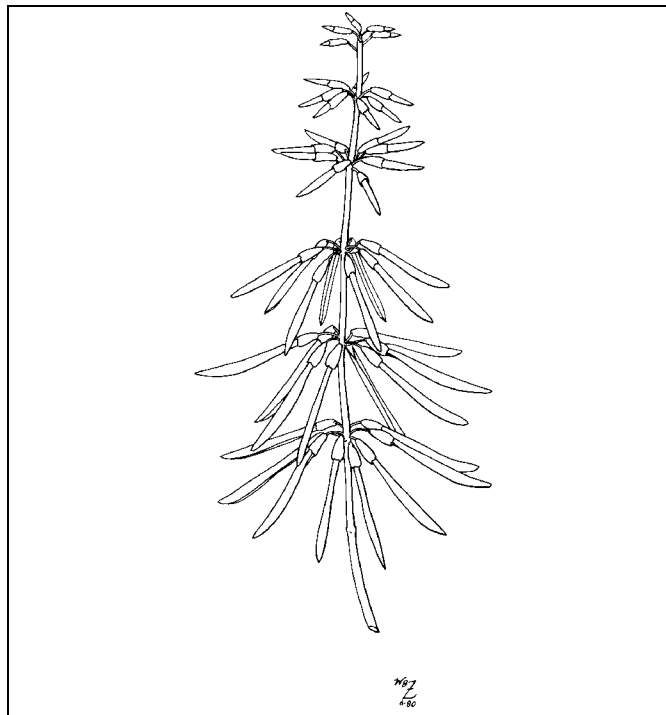


Figure 1. Coral-Bean.

Origin: native to Florida

Uses: border; mass planting; attracts hummingbirds; container or above-ground planter

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

Description

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-197, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Height: 5 to 10 feet
Spread: 8 to 12 feet
Plant habit: round
Plant density: open
Growth rate: moderate
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: trifoliolate
Leaf margin: lobed
Leaf shape: deltoid
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: red
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: thorns present; not particularly showy
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam;
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: moderate
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: native plant that often reproduces into nearby landscapes

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

Use and Management

Coral-Bean is often used to give a woodland planting a naturalistic, informal effect. It is also excellent as an accent or specimen plant. The bright red flowers add beautiful highlights to any landscape. It can be planted along a fence where it will climb alone and cover it.

Derivatives of the plant have been used as a laxative. Native Americans ate roots to increase perspiration. The beans have been used to poison rats and to paralyze fish.

Erythrina herbacea should be grown in full sun or partial shade. It is tolerant of a wide range of soils but prefers one that is fertile and well-drained. Fertilize this plant once or twice each year, and cut back the dead tops in the winter.

Propagate Coral-Bean from scarified seed or cuttings; cuttings root very easily.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

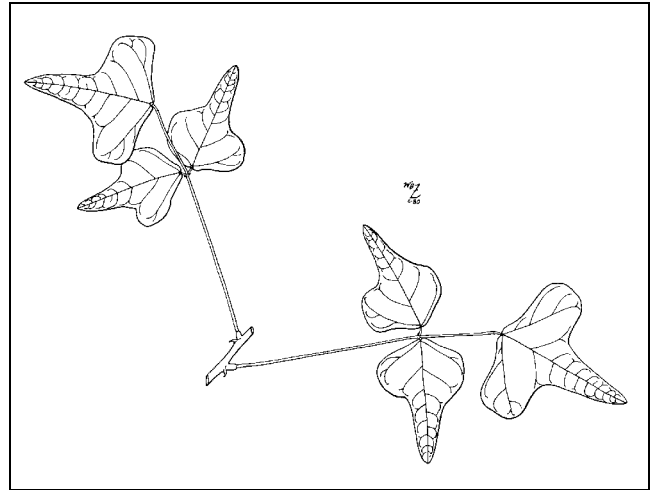


Figure 3. Foliage of Coral-Bean