

# Nature Notes

...from Sharon

## Wild Coffee (*psychotria nervosa*)

Wild Coffee is a native to Florida and is now blooming throughout the Preserve. There are several types of wild coffee in Florida. What we see at Barefoot is known as Shiny-Leafed Wild Coffee. This shrub can tolerate sun as well as shade; however, you will find the taller, fuller plants in shaded areas—which makes it an excellent understory shrub. The stems are covered with a bone-colored, smooth bark that is hairy in some variants. (Newer stems will be green.) The plants are drought tolerant; however, are very susceptible to temperatures below freezing.



Being so versatile, it is a nice native plant for home gardens. It can reach heights of 10-15 feet. The leaves are simple, oppositely arranged, and usually 6 inches long at maturity. The narrow spear-shaped leaves with conspicuous veins give an overall wrinkled appearance. Although the top of the leaves are shiny, the underside is a paler green and is dull instead of shiny. The picture at the left shows the back of the leaf in the foreground, compared with rest of plant in background.

The delicate, tiny, tubular white flowers usually bloom during the warm months of the year. The flowers attract bees as well as butterflies, such as the Zebra Longwing (the Florida State butterfly). Be sure to take a walk around the preserve to see these tiny flowers while they are still in bloom.



In late summer and fall, the blooms will be followed by small berries that attract wildlife. At maturity, the fruits (drupes) are round, bright-red berries. The fruits are juicy, with little flavor. The fruits have two seeds within that resemble coffee beans and are an important food source for cardinals, catbirds, mockingbirds, blue jays, and other birds. If you look closely at the flowers above on the right, you will see a couple tiny, pale fruits forming, where the blooms have dropped from the stem.

Although it is related to Arabica coffee that you may drink each morning and Native Americans brewed wild coffee beans for ceremonies and medicinal purposes, this species is not recommended for human consumption. You may find publications that state this plant was used to treat various ailments, however, it bears repeating...it is **not** recommended for human consumption. The leaves and seeds of this plant contain alkaloids and, as its Latin name of *psychotria nervosa* suggests, it can cause adverse psychotic reactions. It does not affect birds that eat the berries, because the fruit digests and the seeds pass through undigested.