



FYN Garden Q & A Series

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FYN Topic: Copperleaf Plant (Acalypha)

Question: What took the copper color out of my copperleaf plant? It went from having burgundy-colored, reddish leaves last year to almost all green and cream colored leaves this year. I've pruned back the plant each year to destroy mealy bug damage and no fertilizer or pesticides were ever used. It is on the southeast corner of my house growing in dabbled sun and shade all year. What caused its color to change? Ben, CC

Answer: You've observed something quite amazing but quite normal for copperleaf. Your plant is adjusting to continually changing daily and seasonal light levels. Leaf color, size and texture can vary tremendously due to the cultivar you have and the amount of sun and shade it receives.

Over 28 different named cultivars are available of copperleaf. Most cultivars live up to their name producing pink, dark reddish and coppery brown leaves. Your copperleaf is showing its resilience. Look closely at the base of your plant. Having just a few stems coming from the base of the plant each year is usually due to intense shade. Your plant is essentially compensating for minimal light by producing suckers or what's called, sports. These are branches that will show differences in the original leaf coloration. Your plant's leaf color change is quite significant going from bronze to light-colored green and cream suddenly in one season. Consider increasing the light levels. A copperleaf's color variation intensifies when light levels increase. Think of your plant as a sundial and simply adapting to the sun's changing position in the sky by changing its leaf colors. See if the color change will hybridize by propagating one of the newly colored stems. Root a tip or branch cutting in well drained soil in a pot. Incidentally, your original copperleaf plant looks like the cultivar, 'Tiki Peach Swirl.' or 'Macafeeana.' Both contain leaves with swirls of pink, peach and green. The new leaf coloration looks like the species coloration for its species form, *A. wilkesiana*.

Useful Links

<http://www.floridayards.org>
<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/Insuf>
<http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>
<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>



Copper-colored leaves



Insufficient light

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 239-533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. or by emailing Extgardener@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

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