

Ernodea littoralis

Family: Rubiaceae

Golden creeper; beach creeper; coughbush



Golden creeper is a good ground cover for difficult areas.

Golden Creeper

Synonyms (Discarded Names): *Ernodea angusta*

Origin: Florida, the Bahamas, the Caribbean, Belize, Honduras

U.S.D.A. Zone: 10b-12b (Minimum of 36°F)

Growth Rate: Moderate

Light Requirements: High

Flower Characteristics: Insignificant

Flowering Months: White flowers year round

Leaf Persistence: Evergreen

Salt Tolerance: High

Drought Tolerance: High

Soil: Acidic; slightly alkaline; sandy, clay

Nutritional Requirements: Low

Potential Pests: None known

Typical Dimensions: 3 ft. high, 3-6 ft. wide

Propagation: Seed, cuttings, layering

Human hazards: None

Uses: Good for arid, rocky areas, road medians, parking lots, and as dune stabilizer



Often yellow leaves give the plant its common name.



Low-maintenance golden creeper is often planted in median strips.

Natural Geographic Distribution and Ecological Function

South Florida coastal areas can be quite dry. These areas are sparsely vegetated with prickly pear cactus, various grasses, and low shrubs. Among the several shrubs found in these areas is the golden creeper (*Ernodea littoralis*). It is a low, sprawling vine-like shrub. It grows naturally on coastal sand dunes in south Florida, from Volusia County on the east to Hillsborough County on the west. Few surviving native colonies of golden creeper exist. However, it is being planted on beaches in many areas to reclaim a native Florida landscape. Golden creeper is also native to the Bahamas, the Caribbean, southern Mexico, Belize and Honduras. It is unaffected by salt spray but will not tolerate flooding by salt water. The species makes an excellent dune stabilizer growing in the most inhospitable dry and sandy soils.

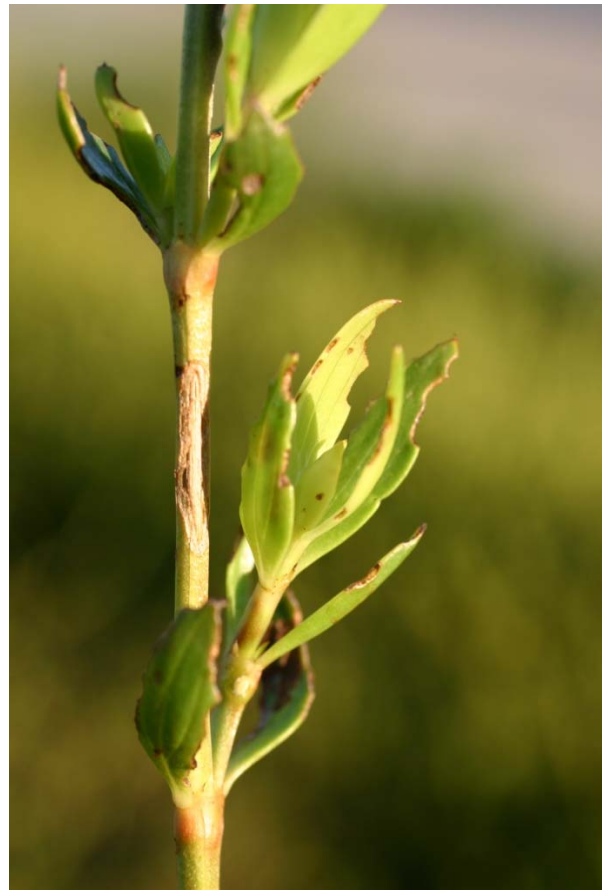
Growth Habit, Morphology and Reproduction

Golden creeper is a vine-like shrub with slender, long, curving branches, with a tendency to arch to the ground. The base is woody. Its dimensions are highly variable depending on growing conditions. Usually it grows 1 to 3 feet tall, much broader than tall, and spreads 3 to 6 feet across. Leaves grow in clusters. They are entire, simple, narrowly elliptic, fleshy, and about 1 to 1.5 inches long. Leaf arrangement is opposite or subopposite. Leaves are bright, glossy green but are more often completely yellow, perhaps from stress, and thus the common name, golden creeper. Flowers grow from the axils of the leaves and, though small and inconspicuous, are very attractive. The flowers are tubular with four pink lobes and a long white corolla tube. They bloom all year. The fruit is a drupe. It is round, sometimes oval, yellow, fleshy, indehiscent and contains a single stony seed.

Golden creeper sparingly suckers from its roots. Spreading by self-sown seed is rare or absent in most gardens. It can be propagated by planting rooted stems, or by ground layering a branch. Experience with growing the plant from seed is limited and germination takes about five months.



A beach colony of golden creeper



Leaves are clustered toward the end of the stems.

Planting and Maintenance Guidelines

Golden creeper is most often planted as a groundcover. It is especially useful as a driveway or sidewalk border; where full sun, poor soils, or distance from a water source make other plants impractical. Due to its cold sensitivity, it is not recommended for inland south Florida counties nor locations in coastal counties where winter temperatures frequently drop below 35°F. Before planting, be sure the designated area is weed free. Plant one gallon container plants about 24 inches on center. Mulch to a depth of around 2 inches to discourage weeds. It will take about 18 months to form an acceptable groundcover. Spacing of 36 to 60 inches is also acceptable but it will take longer to produce a groundcover. Golden creeper does not require supplemental water when established. A field report indicates that newly established plants, when trim to spread, grow up to 3 feet tall. However, when left alone they generally stay closer to 2 feet tall. A year or more after planting, clip approximately two to three times in the spring, summer and fall to maintain desired height. Unpruned plants have a tendency to become leggy. Do not clip at all in the winter. Thus, two to three clippings a year is all that is needed for most maintenance schedules. Heavy summer rain and excess irrigation may make some plants unattractive. Fertilize it in the spring to enhance a green color.



Leaves and flower



Round golden-yellow drupes (fruits)



Drupes in dense clusters

References:

Gilman, E.F. 1999. *Ernodea littoralis*. Fact Sheet FPS-196. Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida. 3 p.

Workman, Richard W. 1980. Growing Native Native Plants for landscape use in Coastal South Florida. The Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, Inc., Sanibel, FL

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