



Pat Chellman

CORAL HONEYSUCKLE, by Pat Chellman. . . Page 3

You Won't Be Disappointed With Coral Honeysuckle

by Pat Chellman

Call it native honeysuckle, coral honeysuckle, woodbine, trumpet honeysuckle or *Lonicera sempervirens*. Better still, call it an outstanding native plant!

Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) is in the honeysuckle family (Caprifoliaceae). Its pinkish-red, trumpet-shaped flowers with yellow centers are borne in clusters at the ends of stems. The flowers are usually 2½–5 cm (1–2 inches) long with 5-lobed corolla, and have no fragrance. Leaves that vary from blue or gray-green to yellow-green to dark green are 4–8 cm (1½–3 inches) long. An unusual feature of the foliage is that the last pair of leaves on the stem will be connate, or joined together, with the stem growing through the center of what appears to be a single leaf. The remainder of the leaves on the plant are oppositely arranged along the stem and are highly variable in shape.

This evergreen native vine has a loose, irregular growth habit which goes well with naturalistic settings as a ground cover or allowed to twine on fences, lamp posts, mailboxes, or trellises. It is beautiful on brick walls and will soften strong architectural features with its growth pattern and graceful clusters of colorful blooms.

You can find coral honeysuckle growing in upland mixed forests in north Florida and sandhill and upland mesic hardwood forests in central Florida. It grows naturally in thickets or clearings and along fence rows generally north of Lake Okechobee and throughout much of the eastern United States from Maine west to Nebraska and Texas. Naturally, with this range it will tolerate cold, probably dying back in the northern U.S., yet only changing leaf color during Florida's coldest winter a few years back.

Coral honeysuckle has only a slight salt tolerance, does okay in partial shade, but prefers full sun, will grow in poor soil (Florida's Department of Transportation's standard mix!) under drought conditions, yet will always give you blooms. Just don't give it too much water.

Propagation can be by cuttings,



layering, or seeds. I've found that runners spreading across the ground will root naturally, and a little pulling and snipping will get you a new plant.

Other cultivars listed in the trade are 'Sulphurea' (yellow), 'Superba' (bright red) and 'Magnifica' (large bright red). The Sulphurea will grow in Florida, but I'm not sure about the other two.

Hummingbirds are attracted to the flowers and other birds are attracted to the red berries, which have been used in Christmas flower arrangements.

I had used this vine sparingly before 1989, but when I needed something that was drought tolerant and colorful to cover berms on I-275 in Tampa, I chose coral honeysuckle. It has more than proved itself for this environment, and now is used extensively for medians, roadsides, and slopes in highway beautification projects.

Coral honeysuckle is a vigorous grower, yet easy to keep within limits, and does not get out of control like the Japanese honeysuckle. The plants on I-275 have formed a thick mat that weeds don't grow through. This year I ran a hedge trimmer over

the top of them to promote new growth and keep the runners out of the trees. This was the first serious trimming in four years.

Says Sally Wasowski in *Native Texas Plants* about coral honeysuckle's growth, "It's that ideal medium between being aggressive enough to grow well and being well behaved enough to make you happy you selected it."

You won't be disappointed if you try this vine.

Pat Chellman has her own landscaping business.

REFERENCES

- Bell, C. Ritchie and Bryan J. Taylor. 1982. *Florida Wild Flowers and Roadside Plants*. Laurel Hill Press, Chapel Hill, NC. 308 pp.
- Odenwald, Neil G. and James R. Turner. *Plants for the South, A Guide for Landscape Design*. Claitor's Publishing Division, Baton Rouge, LA. 565 pp.
- Southern Living Gardening, Trees & Shrubs, Ground Covers & Vines*. 1980. Oxmoor House, Inc., Birmingham, AL. 260 pp.
- Taylor, Walter Kingsley. 1992. *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers*. Taylor Publishing Co., Dallas, TX. 320 pp.
- Wasowski, Sally and Andy Wasowski. 1988. *Native Texas Plants*. Texas Monthly Press, Austin, TX. 406 pp.
- Xeric Landscaping with Florida Native Plants*. 1991. AFNN Publications Committee, San Antonio, FL. 67 pp.