

*Acalypha wilkesiana*

[Synonyms : *Acalypha godseffiana*, *Acalypha hamiltoniana*, *Acalypha tricolor*]

**BEEFSTEAK PLANT** is an evergreen shrub. Native to the Pacific (particularly Fiji) it has inconspicuous tiny, reddish flowers.

It is also known as *Acálifa* (Portuguese), *Acalypha*, *Beefsteak-acalypha*, *Copperleaf*, *Fijian fire bush*, *Fire dragon plant*, *Folha de Cobre* (Portuguese), *Headache bush*, *Jacob's coat*, *Kirjokissanhantā* (Finnish), *Kobberblad* (Danish), *Match-me-if-you-can*, *Mosaikblad* (Swedish), *Painted copperleaf*, *Ricinelle* (French), *Ricinelle de Wilkes* (French), *Wilkes acalypha*, *Wilkes Kupferblatt* (German), and *Wilkes Nesselblatt* (German).

Warning – some authorities suggest that the plant or parts of it may be poisonous.

*Wilkesiana* commemorates the name of an American explorer and naval officer, Charles Wilkes (1798-1877) who had an illustrious career (despite his ignominious departure when he retired from the US Navy in 1866 after being court-martialled for disobedience). He headed the United States Exploring Expedition, also known as the Wilkes Expedition, to the South Pacific Islands and the Antarctic Continent (1838-1842) and some authorities claim it provided a significant contribution to the basis of American science. It yielded geological, botanical, zoological and anthropological specimens and artefacts (eventually to form the basis of the Smithsonian Institution collection), as well as international recognition for three of the scientific members. Subsequently Wilkes published many articles and reports of the Expedition's progress and collected findings, not least in 1844 *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*. It is Charles Wilkes after whom an area of the Antarctic Continent, Wilkes Land, is named.

Today the shrub is popular in many countries as an ornamental plant because of its colourful foliage (red/purple-mottled or streaked, coppery green leaves).

Medicinally, the leaves have been used locally in some West Indian Islands either in a poultice or as a tea taken to ease headaches, and in Nigeria they have been used for treating skin infections.