Coral Bean  
Erythrina herbacea

Introduction
Erythrina herbacea is a shrub that may attain a height of 20 feet but is often smaller. It rarely exceeds a height of 8 feet in the northern and central sections of Florida. The Coral Bean has compound leaves that are semi-deciduous, and these 6- to 8-inch-long leaves are composed of three shallow-lobed leaflets. The leaves are light to medium green in color and have prickles on their midribs; the prickles are found on the underside of the leaflet. The stems of this plant are also armed with short, recurved spines. In south Florida, slender, multiple trunks that are covered with pale, thick bark are formed. Scarlet, tubular flowers are borne in 2-foot-long terminal racemes that can be enjoyed from April to June. These flowers are attractive to hummingbirds. The showy fruits of the Coral Bean are drooping pods that are constricted between the seeds. These pods split in the fall to reveal the beautiful, scarlet seeds.

General Information
Scientific name: Erythrina herbacea  
Pronunciation: air-rith-RYE-nuh hur-BAY-see-uh  
Common name(s): Coral-Bean, Cardinal-Spear, Cherokee-Bean  
Family: Leguminosae  
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous  
USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 11  
Planting month for zone 9: year round  
Origin: native to Florida  
Uses: border; mass planting; attracts hummingbirds; container or above-ground planter  
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description
Height: 5 to 10 feet  
Spread: 8 to 12 feet  
Plant habit: round  
Plant density: open  
Growth rate: moderate  
Texture: medium

Foliage
Leaf arrangement: alternate  
Leaf type: trifoliate  
Leaf margin: lobed  
Leaf shape: deltoid  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen  
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: no fall color change
Flower
Flower color: red
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering

Fruit
Fruit shape: pod or pod-like
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: unknown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches
Trunk/bark/branches: thorns present; not particularly showy
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture
Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam;
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerances: moderate
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other
Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: native plant that often reproduces into nearby landscapes
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management
Coral-Bean is often used to give a woodland planting a naturalistic, informal effect. It is also excellent as an accent or specimen plant. The bright red flowers add beautiful highlights to any landscape. It can be planted along a fence where it will climb alone and cover it. Derivatives of the plant have been used as a laxative. Native Americans ate roots to increase perspiration. The beans have been used to poison rats and to paralyze fish. Erythrina herbacea should be grown in full sun or partial shade. It is tolerant of a wide range of soils but prefers one that is fertile and well-drained. Fertilize this plant once or twice each year, and cut back the dead tops in the winter. Propagate Coral-Bean from scarified seed or cuttings; cuttings root very easily.

Pests and Diseases
No pests or diseases are of major concern.

by Edward F. Gilman