

Native Plants

What is that plant with the bright red blooms you see peeking out at the edges of the road about now? It's probably *Aesculus pavia* also known as Scarlet Buckeye, Red buckeye, and Firecracker plant. Native from North Carolina south to Florida, west to central Texas, and as far north as Illinois, *Aesculus pavia* is a handsome shrub or small tree with showy panicles of deep red or yellow, campanulate flowers in early spring. The flower clusters are 6-10 inches long, and the individual flowers are 1-1 1/2 inches long. The stamens are rarely much longer than the top petals, usually shorter. The leaves are made up of 5 leaflets joined at a central point on a stem as long as the leaf. They are fine-toothed, glossy dark green above and whitish beneath.

The leaves usually drop by the end of summer, so try to place it where it will be highly visible in the early spring but less noticeable after it drops its leaves. The seeds and young shoots are poisonous if ingested, and indigenous people crushed these parts and put them in water to stupefy fish for easier capture. Soap may be obtained from the roots and a black dye from the wood. The species name, *pavia*, is in honor of Peter Paaw, a 16th century Dutch botanist.



Flowers attract hummingbirds and bees. Since the ruby throated hummingbird migration is just beginning in the lowcountry, this is a great plant to draw them to your yard. Nuts consumed by squirrels.

American Indians threw powdered seeds and crushed branches of this and other buckeyes into pools of water to stupefy fish. The fish then rose to the surface and were easily caught. Pioneers used the gummy roots as a soap substitute and the wood to produce a black dye.

Photographer: Loughmiller, Campbell and Lynn
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<http://www.wildflower.org>