

## CORKWOOD

*Leitneria floridana* Chapman

**Synonyms:** none

**Family:** Simaroubaceae (quassia)

**FNAI Ranks:** G3/S3

**Legal Status:** US-none; FL-Threatened



Stems unbranched or sparsely short branched. Vegetative reproduction forming a multitude of clones. Growing in canal at Spring Creek Unit of Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.

**Field Description:** Deciduous **shrub or small tree** occurring in colonies. **Stem** solitary, erect to 5 m tall, reddish with small corky patches and conspicuous leaf scars. **Leaf** blades lanceolate to narrowly elliptic, greater than 14 cm long, greater than 4.5 cm wide, Length to width ratio greater than 3.4; upper leaf surface nearly glabrous, often glossy; lower leaf surface nearly glabrous; leaf vestiture restricted to the midrib, secondary veins, and margin on both surfaces; **flowers** are borne in erect catkins on last year's wood before leaves emerge; **female and male flowers** usually on separate plants. **Female catkins** 5 - 7 cm long, dark red; **male catkins** 6 - 8 cm long, yellow-brown. **Fruits** smooth, yellow turning to brown, leathery, 2 - 4 cm long, flattened on one side, rounded on the other, in clusters.

**Similar Species:** Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) grows in wet habitats similar to corkwood with leaves having a similar overall shape and size to corkwood. However, buttonbush is distinguished by having opposite leaves while corkwood has alternate leaves.

**Related Rare Species:** There are no other closely related rare species in Florida.

**Habitat:** Edges of marshy openings and along small drainages in coastal hydric hammocks; fresh or tidal marshes; frequently associated with saw grass (*Cladium jamaicense*).

**Best Survey Season:** Spring-fall; March - October; identifiable year round by fruits, corky bark, leaves, and overall wandlike appearance.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Southwest GA, East GA, and Panhandle FL east along the Big Bend to Levy County.

**Conservation Status:** Half of Florida's populations occur in conservation areas along the Big Bend region. Unprotected sites are mainly threatened by silviculture activities in hydric hammocks and near coastal flatwoods. The species is common in the Big Bend region particularly in hydric hammocks between the Aucilla and Steinhatchee Rivers in Taylor County, Florida.

**Protection and Management:** Natural hydrology is required for the maintenance of corkwood populations. Remove invasive exotic plants and limit disturbances from boats along shoreline near populations.

**References:** Weakley, A. S. and the Southeastern Flora Team 2024, Wunderlin and Hansen 2011.



Large cylindrical buds next to noticeable leaf scar. Growing in canal at Spring Creek Unit of Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



Fruiting in hydric hammock at Snipe Island Unit of Big Bend Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Kelly Anderson.



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