

## **Heliconia caribaea Caribbean heliconia, Wild Plantain<sup>1</sup>**

Edward F. Gilman, Alan Merrow<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

The Wild Plantain is an herbaceous perennial with leathery, dark green leaves which are borne on long petioles arising directly from the ground (Fig. 1). The Wild Plantain has no trunk or stems but manages to grow 10 to 15 feet tall due to the enormous leaves. The attractive petioles are usually 4 to 5 feet long, and the leaf blade is equally as long. The flowers are held in showy clusters that emerge from second year stalks. They are enclosed by scarlet or yellow colored bracts that are 6 to 8 inches long. This unique plant is used as a specimen for tropical gardens. The inflorescence may be cut for indoor decoration where they last for several weeks.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Heliconia caribaea*

**Pronunciation:** hel-lick-KOE-nee-uh kuh-RIB-ee-uh

**Common name(s):** Caribbean Heliconia, Wild Plantain

**Family:** *Heliconiaceae*

**Plant type:** herbaceous



**Figure 1.** Caribbean Heliconia.

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** cut flowers; suitable for growing indoors

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Alan Meerow, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Ft. Lauderdale REC, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

### Description

**Height:** 10 to 15 feet

**Spread:** 3 to 6 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** open

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** red; yellow

**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering; summer flowering

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple multi-trunked or clumping

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** more than 36 inches

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** unknown

**Fruit length:** unknown

**Fruit cover:** unknown

**Fruit color:** blue

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy



**Figure 3.** Flower of Caribbean Heliconia

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** green

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** very thick

### Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerances:** moderate

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

### Other

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

### Use and Management

Wild Plantain will prosper in locations that receive full or partial sun. It grows and flowers best in fertile, moist soil. Fertilize this plant regularly during the growing season.

Propagate Wild Plantain by division of the matted clumps.

### Pests and Diseases

This plant is bothered by *Cercospora* and *Helminthosporium* leaf spots. Scales and nematodes may also cause problems.