

# Nature Notes

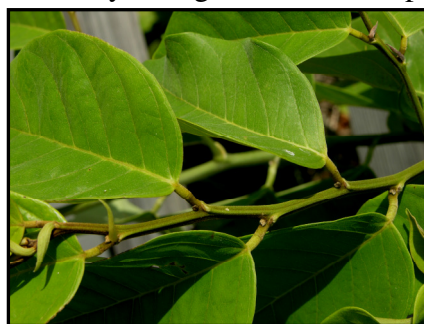
...from Sharon

Coin Vines thrive in habitats that include coastal strands, coastal hammocks, borders of mangrove swamps, river and stream banks. Can you think of a place that has most of these habitats? Right! Barefoot Beach Preserve, where you may find the Coin Vine throughout the grounds. The species can tolerate constant salt spray and moderately salty soils. This Florida native is a scrambling and climbing shrub in the pea family (*Fabaceae*).

Although its name is Coin “Vine” it can become a small tree, such as the one shown in the picture on the right, with stems that extend as much as 30 feet. Many times, it will use other plants for support, as the stems tend to be brittle. This plant may also sprawl laterally along the ground. Coin vine develops a tap and lateral root system. The tan colored roots support many nodules that attach directly to the tap and lateral roots, making it a good soil stabilizer. The older branches, which may reach three inches in diameter, are silvery-gray and extend into the crowns of low trees and scramble over low obstacles.

There are many long, vine-like branches that bear leaves only on the current year’s growth. The simple, alternate leaves have short

**Coin Vine**  
(*Dalbergia ecastaphyllum*)



petioles (the small stalk attaching the leaf blade to the stem.) and the elliptical or ovate blades up to 5.5 inches long and 3 inches broad. They are leathery, glossy green, rounded at the base, pointed at the tip, and pubescent (has fine hair) on the under side.

It flowers in the spring in our area. The tiny white flowers are only about ¼ inch and are grouped in panicles in the leaf axils. The flowers have little to no fragrance. The Coin Vine is a larval host plant for Whites and Sulphur (Family *Pieridae*) butterflies.



The plants develop small groups of flat, green, circular fruit pods about one inch long, each containing one flat seed. Seed pods are currently on vines along the east Saylor Trail. Look closely under the leaves. The seed pods turn a coppery to gray-brown before they drop off the plant. The seeds you see the most may be a long way from the parent plant, washed out to sea and floated up on the beach. Look along the wrack (trash) line to find these coppery coin-like seeds.



The brittle stems were not suitable for wooden implements or basketry; however, long ago, Native Americans crushed roots and bark that have a chemical used to stupefy and catch fish—now illegal to do. Various extracts have been used in herbal medicine as a diuretic, an emetic, and a vermicide. Care must be taken, because some of the tissues are toxic.