

## Flowering Trees for Central Florida

Flowering trees are an important component of central Florida landscapes. They provide colorful flowers during their season of bloom. Many of these trees also make nice shade specimens. Our climate here in central Florida allows for a wide range of flowering trees to be used. We can grow some of the hardier, temperate climate trees and trees from subtropical and even tropical climates. The following are some of the flowering trees that grow well in our area.

The Trumpet Trees (*Tabebuia*) are some of the most commonly used flowering trees in central Florida landscapes. They flower heavily in spring with trumpet shaped flowers and are easily identified when in bloom. Several species are grown here. *Tabebuia umbellata*, the Yellow Trumpet Tree, is very common in the older neighborhoods or Orlando and Winter Park. It has an upright growth habit and bears bright yellow flowers. It grows 10-20 feet tall. It is native to Brazil. *Tabebuia chrysostricha*, the Golden Trumpet Tree, bears golden yellow flowers. It differs from *T. umbellata* by having a narrow growth habit and reaches 10-15 feet tall. The leaves have rough hairs on the surface giving it a "sandpaper" feel. It is native from Brazil to Argentina. *Tabebuia impetiginosa* is known as the Pink or Purple Trumpet Tree. The flowers are variable; from light pink to purple though most found in Florida have pink flowers. It is a larger tree growing 20-30 feet tall. It is native from Mexico to Argentina. Sometimes the Silver Trumpet Tree, *Tabebuia aurea*, is grown in our area. It is more tender to cold, especially when young. It is very common in southern Florida. The leaves are silvery-green and it bears bright yellow

flowers. It is native to Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. It was formerly known as *T. argentea* and *T. caraiba*. Trumpet Trees are drought tolerant.

Magnolias are another commonly grown flowering tree in central Florida. The Southern Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*, is probably the most widely planted flowering tree in our area. It is a Florida native and well adapted to our climate. Southern Magnolia bears large, extremely fragrant white flowers in late



*Lagerstroemia indica* 'Dynamite'

spring and summer. Southern Magnolias are large trees and can grow 30-60 feet tall. There are many cultivars of this tree available with different growth and flowering habits. 'D.D. Blanchard' has become one of the most popular varieties. It has dark green leaves with orangish-brown undersides. It is also a faster growing variety. 'Little Gem' is the smallest cultivar. It only grows 10-20 feet tall and the flowers and leaves are half the size of a normal Southern Magnolia. It also has a second flowering period, from October until Christmas. 'Alta' is a newer selection with a strong upright form. 'Greenback' has narrower leaves that are cupped and green on both sides. It also has a very dense

growth habit. 'Coco' has a pyramidal shape and is a very heavy bloomer. 'Majestic Beauty' has very large leaves and flowers that can be up to 12" across. 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' has a very dense and compact growth habit with leaves that have a rusty brown underside. Sweetbay Magnolia, *Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*, is another Florida native. It grows well in moist or even wet soils. It is evergreen and the leaves have a nice silvery coloring

on the undersides. Sweetbay grows 30-50 feet tall with a narrow and open form. It bears creamy white, fragrant flowers during the summer. A couple of related trees are *Michelia champaca*, Orange Champaca Tree, and *Michelia x alba*, the White Champaca Tree. These two trees belong to the Magnolia Family (Magnoliaceae). They are fast growing, evergreen trees that grow 20-30 feet tall. They produce flowers about 2" across that are extremely fragrant. The flowers are found

during summer and fall. *Michelia champaca* has orange flowers while those of *Michelia x alba* are white. The White Champaca Tree also produces flowers over a long period of time. These two trees are native to southeastern Asia. Another member of the Magnolia Family and Florida native is *Liriodendron tulipifera*, the American Tulip Tree. It is a tall, deciduous tree that grows 40-60 feet tall. It bears orangish-yellow flowers in late spring and early summer. American Tulip Tree needs a moist soil and can tolerate wet soils.

*Gordonia lasianthus*, Loblolly Bay, is another Florida native that makes a nice landscape specimen. It is an evergreen tree growing 10-30 feet tall. It bears



*Ceiba speciosa* 'Angel'  
inset: *Ceiba* thorns

tree and is widely used as a medicinal. This tree is well behaved and non-invasive. It is not to be confused with the Cajeput Tree, *M. quinquenervia*, which is a serious pest in southern Florida and the Everglades.

The Orchid Trees belong to the genus *Bauhinia* and are widely used in local landscapes. *B. variegata* and *B. purpurea* are both known as the Purple Orchid Tree. The main difference is that *B. purpurea* flowers in fall and

early winter and *B. variegata* flowers in spring. *B. variegata* 'Candida' is a white form that also flowers in spring. These two species are not recommended for planting as they produce large amounts of seeds and can become a nuisance. A

good replacement is *B. x blakeana*, the Hong Kong Orchid Tree. It is a hybrid between *B. purpurea* and *B. variegata*. It is sterile and does not produce seed. It has a longer blooming period than

either parent, from fall until spring. The flowers are magenta and lavender and are fragrant. *B. acuminata* is native to southeastern Asia. It is a large shrub or small tree that grows 8-10 feet tall. It bears white flowers from late spring until fall. It needs afternoon shade. *B. forficata*, the Thorny Orchid Tree, is a native from Brazil to Peru. It bears large, white flowers during the summer. The Yellow Bell Bauhinia, *B. tomentosa* bears small yellow flowers during the warmer months. It is a small tree growing 10-12 feet tall and is native to eastern Africa. The Pom Pom Orchid Tree, *B. divaricata* is native to Central America and the West Indies. It bears small white flowers and has small leaves. It flowers during the warmer months. *B. divaricata* 'Rosea' bears pink flowers.

The Floss Silk Tree, *Ceiba speciosa*, is a spectacular flowering specimen for the warmer parts of central Florida. It is a large, fast growing tree, reaching 30-60 feet tall. It bears large pink flowers in large numbers in fall. The flowers are variable from almost white to deep pink. The trunk of this tree is usually covered in large spines but smooth trunked specimens exist. It is native from Brazil

– continued on page 6



small white flowers during the summer. The flowers resemble those of a *Camellia*. This tree is a close relative to Camellias as it is in the Tea Family (*Theaceae*).

The Bottlebrushes are another common group of flowering trees found in Central Florida. They belong to the genus *Callistemon* and are Australian natives. They bear flowers that are shaped like bottlebrushes. The flowers appear during the warmer months. Most are red in color but there are purple, white, and pink flowering specimens. They are also drought tolerant. The Weeping Bottlebrush, *C. viminalis*, grows to about 20 feet tall and has a strong weeping habit. It bears red flowers. It is also tolerant of very wet soil. The Lemon Bottlebrush, *C. citrinus*, grows 10-15 feet tall. The leaves have a lemon scent if crushed. It also bears red flowers. *C. citrinus* 'Jeffersii', the Purple Bottlebrush, bears purple flowers. It grows to about 10 feet tall. A related tree is the Tea Oil Tree, *Melaleuca alternifolia*. It is from eastern Australia and grows 20-25 feet tall. It produces white flowers and has attractive white, papery bark. Tea Oil is derived from this

*Magnolia grandiflora*  
'Little Gem'





*Cordia boissieri*

## Flowering Trees for Central Florida

*continued from page 5*

to Peru. It was formerly known as *Chorisia speciosa*. The related *C. chodatii* bears yellow flowers and *C. insignis* bears white flowers. Many hybrids between these three species exist. Floss Silk Tree is very drought tolerant. A close relative is *Bombax ceiba*, the Silk Cotton Tree. It is native from southern Asia to northern Australia and grows 50-60 feet tall. It has a spiny trunk similar to the Floss Silk Tree. It bears red flowers in late winter and early spring.

The Tipu Tree, *Tipuana tipu*, is a tree that deserves greater use in central Florida. It is native from southern Brazil to Bolivia and is a fast growing tree that reaches 30-50 feet tall. It bears bright yellow flowers in late spring and summer. Tipu Tree is an excellent tree for our area but not widely available. Once established, it is fairly tolerant of drought. There are many nice specimens at Walt Disney World and Universal Studios.

Jacaranda, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, is a very popular tree in the warmer areas of Florida and California. It blooms in spring and is covered with small, trumpet-shaped flowers that are blue-violet in

color. Jacaranda is native to Argentina and Bolivia. It grows 30-40 feet tall. 'Alba' bears white flowers. *J. cuspidifolia*, from southern Brazil and Argentina, bears larger flowers that appear in the summer. *J. caerulea* only grows 10-120 feet tall. It flowers in spring and summer and is native to the Bahamas and Cuba. Jacarandas are drought tolerant.

Chinadoll Tree, *Radermachera sinica*, is frequently grown as a houseplant. Once planted in the ground it is fast growing and can reach 15-20 feet tall. It bears creamy white flowers in spring and summer. These flowers are fragrant at night. Chinadoll Tree is native to southeastern Asia.

Yellow Poinciana, *Peltophorum dubium*, is a common sight in the Orlando area. It bears brilliant yellow flowers during summer and is a beautiful tree when in full bloom. It is a fast growing, reaching 30-50 feet tall. It is also very drought tolerant. Yellow Poinciana was at one time commonly available but can be difficult to find in nurseries. It is native from southern Brazil to Uruguay.

*Grevillea robusta*, Silk-Oak, is a native of eastern Australia. It is not a true Oak but a member of the Proteaceae Family.

This large group of plants are known for their unusual flowers. The Silk-Oak bears golden orange flowers in late spring and summer. These flowers are brush-shaped. *G. robusta* is fast growing and reaches 30-50 feet tall. It is also drought tolerant. Silk-Oak was at one time a very popular tree in the Orlando area. The three big freezes in the 1980's killed many of them but some remain. A related tree is the Firewheel Tree, *Stenocarpus sinuatas*. It is also native to eastern Australia and grows to about 40 feet tall. It bears tubular flowers that are scarlet red and arranged in whorls. The large leaves are pinnately lobed.

Crepe Myrtle, *Lagerstroemia indica*, is a very popular flowering tree in this area. There are several other Crepe Myrtles that are rarely

encountered but deserve a spot in the landscape. The Japanese Crepe Myrtle, *L. fauriei* is not commonly used in central Florida landscapes. Japanese Crepe Myrtle is a larger tree growing 30-50 feet tall. It is deciduous and bears white flowers during the summer. The tree has very ornamental trunks. The bark flakes away revealing dark, cinnamon red coloring. Japanese Crepe Myrtle has been used in hybridization with *L. indica* as it has resistance to powdery mildew. It is native to southern Japan. *L. limii*, The Chinese Crepe Myrtle, grows 10-15 feet tall. It has large leaves and bears large clusters of lavender-pink flowers in summer. It is native to southern China. *L. speciosa*, the Queen Crepe Myrtle, is native to southeastern Asia. It can grow 30-50 feet tall but is tender to cold and best suited to warm microclimates. It bears large clusters of purple flowers and a cultivar called 'Nong Nooch Pink' bears hot pink flowers. There is also a hybrid between *L. indica* and *L. speciosa* called 'Majestic Beauty' that only grows 5-10 feet tall and bears purple flowers similar to *L. speciosa* but is hardier to cold.

– Eric Schmidt