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.

For the gardener who is adventurous or who lives in a very warm and protected microclimate, there are a few tropical flowering trees that are worth the effort. The Royal Poinciana, Delonix regia, is a native of Madagascar. It is a fast growing tree reaching 30-40 feet tall. It bears orangish-red flowers in spring and summer. S. campanulata var. lutea bears yellow blooms. Kigelia africana, the Sausage Tree, is a real curiosity. It is native from tropical Africa to southern Africa and grows 30-50 feet tall. The dark maroon flowers appear in summer and hang from the tree on long stalks. If these flowers get pollinated, large spongy seed pods appear. These pods can be 1 to 2 feet in length and resemble sausages.

For those gardeners that miss flowering trees that heralded the arrival of spring in more northern parts of the country, several of these trees can be grown in central Florida. Eastern Dogwood, Cornus florida, can be coaxed into growing in local landscapes. They grow 10-15 feet tall and bare white flowers in early spring before the leaves appear. They are not as showy bloomers as they are further north. Eastern Dogwood prefers a lightly shaded location (at least in the afternoon) and moist soil. They also need good air circulation. For central Florida, it is best to grow the cultivar ‘Weaver’s’ as it is the best heat tolerant variety. The pink forms will not grow here. Eastern Redbud, Cercis canadensis, is another spring bloomer that flowers before the leaves appear. It bears small rosy-pink flowers along the stems. It has similar requirements to Eastern Dogwood. ‘Forest Pansy’ is a variety that has burgundy colored foliage when it first emerges. It usually fades to green by mid-summer. C. racemosa ‘Avondale’, the Chinese Redbud, has performed well here at Leu Gardens. It flowers in spring like other Cercis but ours also has a light bloom in the fall. American Fringe Tree, Chionanthus virginicus, is another spring bloomer that grows well here. It can be grown in sun or shade but looks best with at least afternoon shade. It grows 10-20 feet tall. The tree blooms in early spring before the foliage emerges and is covered in lacy white flowers. This tree is native to the eastern U.S. including northern Florida. Prunus umbellata, the Flatwoods Plum, is a Florida native growing 10-15 feet tall. It is deciduous and is covered with small white flowers in early spring. It is an understory tree and grows best in a shaded location. It bears small purple plums in summer. The fruits are bitter but are loved by birds. A similar Florida native, P. angustifolia, is the Chickasaw Plum. It is similar to P. umbellata but this one suckers heavily and forms small colonies. For those who miss the Flowering Cherries found further north,
there is one that can be grown locally. *Prunus campanulata* is a low-chill species that will grow and flower in central Florida. It is known as the Taiwan Flowering Cherry and is a native of Taiwan, southern China and southern Japan. It grows 20-25 feet tall and bears small pink flowers amongst the bare branches in early spring. It likes full sun. *Prunus persica* ‘Martha Jane’ is a Flowering Nectarine that grows well here in central Florida. It grows 10 to 15 feet tall and bears double pink flowers in early spring.

Several of the trees previously mentioned in this article are drought tolerant and can handle periodic dry conditions. There are several flowering tree choices that are extremely drought tolerant and are excellent choices for dry areas. These trees can survive on their own with normal rainfall once they are established. They also can grow well in an irrigated landscape as well. *Acacia farnesiana*, Sweet Acacia, is a spiny tree growing 10-20 feet tall. It bears bright yellow, round flowers that are extremely fragrant. It flowers heavily in spring and sporadically during the warmer months. It is a Central American native. *A. stenophylla*, the String Acacia, is a graceful weeping tree that grows 10-20 feet tall. It has very narrow but long foliage that is blue-green in color. It bears small, creamy colored flowers in summer. This tree is hardy and is becoming common out west in places like Las Vegas, Tucson, and Phoenix. It is native to eastern Australia. Mexican Poinciana, *Caesalpinia mexicana* is fast growing reaching 10-15 feet tall. It bears small yellow flowers almost all year. It is a native of southern Mexico. *Cordia boisieri*, the White Cordia Tree, is one of the best flowering trees for this area. It is fast growing, cold hardy, and bears white flowers all year. Sometimes the tree only has a few flowers, at other times it is covered in white. It only grows 10-15 feet tall and is native to southern Texas and northern Mexico. Sicklebush, *Dichrostachys cinerea*, is native from southern Africa to India. It is a small tree growing 10 to 15 feet tall and bears pendulant purple flowers with yellow stamens during the warmer months. The flowers fade to white after several days. *Ebenopsis ebano*, Texas Ebony, is an evergreen tree that grows 10 to 15 feet tall. It bears small, creamy white flowers several times during the warmer months. These flowers are very fragrant. It was formerly known as *Pithecellobium flexicaule*. *Erythrina cristata-galli*, Coral Tree, is native to a large area of eastern South America. It grows to about 20 feet tall. It bears pendulant clusters of dark red flowers in summer. The Jerusalem Thorn, *Parkinsonia aculeata*, is actually native from southern Arizona and Texas to Argentina. It is a spiny, deciduous tree that grows 10-15 feet tall. It bears small, yellow flowers in summer and the narrow foliage gives it an airy look.

*Pithecellobium brevifolia* is a native of northern Mexico. It is a small tree reaching about 10 feet tall and bears small, white flowers during the warmer months. *Thevetia peruviana*, Yellow Oleander, is native to Central America. It is not a true Oleander but is a close relative. It has small, narrow, glossy leaves and bears yellow, bell-shaped flowers during most of the year. *T. peruviana var. aurantiaca* bears orange flowers while *T. peruviana var. alba* bears white flowers. It grows 10-15 feet tall.

Some of these flowering trees can easily be found in local nurseries and garden shops. Others are more difficult to locate. A good source to find the more rare trees and for information is the Central Florida Flowering Tree Society. They meet every other month here at Leu Gardens. Another source is the Spring Plant Sale at Leu Gardens. Some of the more unusual and rare specimens can be found for sale at the assortment of vendors.

– Eric Schmidt