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 chrysotricha*, 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 large 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 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...
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 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. × 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* ‘Rosa’ 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
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 sinuatus*. 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, 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 harder to cold.

– Eric Schmidt