Ornamental Flowering Trees in Florida

Stephen Brown
Lee County Extension 
Horticulture

What are Flowering Trees?

- Trees whose floral display are visually the most important or most conspicuous phase of their year-round appearance.

- All trees flower, but these are not "flowering trees."

Catkins of Live Oak (Quercus virginiana)

Racemes of Black Olive (Bucida buceras)

Bombax ceiba (Red Silk-Cotton tree)

Jacaranda mimosifolia (Jacaranda)
Flowering Trees

• Florida has been invaded by many tropical Flowering Trees
• Many trees from warm countries are much hardier than generally supposed
• Many can survive and grow well in Zone 9

Sequential Bloomers

Year 1 – March 1  Year 1 – March 5  Year 1 – March 10
Year 2 – March 5  Year 2 – March 10  Year 2 – March 15
Year 3 – February 26  Year 3 – March 3  Year 3 – March 8
Sequential Bloomers

1st 2nd 3rd

Yellow Tabebuia (Tabebuia aurea)

Growth Rate and Spacing

January, 2015. 41 months later

Intense Blooming Days (IBD)

• The numbers of days when 50% or more of a tree’s canopy is covered with flowers

• IBD are based on frequent observations of at least three trees within a single species for no less than three years
IBD Example: Comparing two forms of *Plumeria rubra*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plumeria Form</th>
<th>Avg. start date</th>
<th>IBD</th>
<th>Avg. end date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>lutea</em></td>
<td>April 16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>June 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>rubra</em></td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>August 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tree for Zone 8b
Warmest parts of North Florida

From 8b-10b

Jerusalem Thorn
*Parkinsonia aculeata*

Zone 8b
15°F

Flowering Months: April-July
Flower Color: Yellow
Growth Rate: Fast
Dimension: 25 x 40'

Leaf Type: Pinnate
Messiness: Moderate when flowering
Type: Deciduous
Drought Tolerance: High

Early May
Jerusalem Thorn

Growth Habit: Smooth, yellow-green, or blue-green bark, wiry branchlets, airy crown, terminal spines.
Origin: Mexico to Honduras

Best ways to id

Leaves: Two or three pinnate, long, yellow-green and drooping. Never truly leafless

Flowers: Racemes. Bright yellow, blotched orange.

Tipu Tree/Pride-of-Bolivia
Tipuana tipu

Zone 8b
18°F

Flowering months: May-July
Leaf Type: Pinnate
Messiness: Low
Type: Evergreen

Growth Rate: Fast
Flower color: Yellow
Tipu Tree

Underview: Aged to produce horizontal widespread branches and dense canopy. Can be thinned to produce an open structure.

Tipu Tree
Best ways to id

Flowers: Pea-like, pinkish-white petals. Trees crowded with these.

Leaves: Alternate, odd-pinnate. Virtually evergreen trees.

Trees for Zone 9a
Coldest parts of Central Florida

From 9a-10b
Texas Wild Olive
*Cordia boissieri*

**Zones:** 9a
**Temperature:** 20°F

**Flowering Months:** Year round
**Flower Color:** White
**Leaf Type:** Simple
**Growth Rate:** Medium
**Type:** Evergreen
**Origin:** Texas and Mexico

**Messiness:** Moderate-High

**Dimension:** 20’x

**Facts:**
- May need pruning to form a small tree. Commonly seen on roadways.

**Texas Wild Olive Best way to id**

**Flowers:** Funnel-shaped, crinkled petals, chalk-white with yellow center on terminal clusters. 56-82 IBD

**Leaves:** Alternate, simple, rough, ovate to ovate-oblong, to 11” long

**Fruits:** Drupes, fleshy, ovoid, 0.5” long, persistent calyxes
Weeping Bottlebrush
Melaleuca viminalis

Flowering Months: January-May
Leaf Type: Alternate, simple, linear-lanceolate
Messiness: Low
Growth Rate: Medium
Type: Evergreen
Dimension: 21’x30’

Zone 9a
20°F

Growth Habit: The largest and most robust of the bottlebrush trees available. It allowed the “weeping” stems would touch the ground. Weeping habit makes it a good shelter for wildlife.

Flowers: Arranged on pendulous cylindrical spikes, to 5.0 inches long, usually from 30-70 stalkless florets. 41 IB
Weeping Bottlebrush

Best way to id

Leaves: Simple, linear-lanceolate. New growth silvery pubescent

Flowers: Cylindrical, pendulous. Many stalkless red florets. Good nectar source. Bees, Bees, Bees!

Fruits: Capsules, woody, stalkless, dehiscent, 0.2” long

Mid-January

'Red Cluster' Bottlebrush

Melaleuca 'Red Cluster'

Zone 9a
19°F

Flowering Months: February-April

Leaf Type: Alternate, simple, linear-lanceolate, dull green, to 2.5 inches long

Growth Rate: Medium

Messiness: Low

Type: Evergreen

Dimension: 10’x20’

Immediate repeat bloom

Flower buds on spike.

Mid April

Upright spike

Immediate repeat bloom
**‘Red Cluster’ Bottlebrush**

*Best way to id*

- **Growth Habit:** Upright, compact crown, often with several trunks
- **Flowers:** On upwards pointing spikes. Repeat bloomer

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**Golden Rain Tree**

*Koelreuteria elegans*

- **Flowering Months:** September-October
- **Leaf Type:** Even-pinnate
- **Flower Color:** Yellow
- **Messiness:** Medium-High
- **Growth Rate:** Medium
- **Type:** Deciduous
- **Dimension:** 35'x55'
- **Origin:** Taiwan, Japan
- **Zone:** 9a
- **20°F**

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- **Zone:** 9a
- **20°F**

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Golden Rain Tree
Best ways to id

Flowering: Many small sweetly fragrant yellow flowers on long panicles up to 18" long appearing above the foliage. Begins flowering in September. [17] I8D

Golden Rain Tree
Best ways to id

Fruits: Capsules, bladder-like, papery, pinkish-red, to 2 inches wide with black seeds

Red Silk-Cotton Tree
Bombax ceiba

Flowering Months: January-April
Leaf Type: Alternate, palmate
Growth Rate: Fast
Dimension: 80' x 50'
Red Silk-Cotton Tree

Underview: Completely leafless with about 26 IBD

Red Silk-Cotton Tree


Deciduous
Messiness

Large individual flowers are short-lived and bring color to the ground.

Messiness

Messy white silky cotton on neighborhood streets.

Red Silk-Cotton Tree

Best ways to id

Flowers: 6-7” long, up to 1” wide. Solitary or in clusters at or near end of branches. Five satiny, red, scarlet, or sometimes white strongly reflexed petals.

February 23

February 24

IBO
Red Silk-Cotton Tree
Best ways to id

Leaves: Alternate, palmate, to 24" long, commonly 5-7 lanceolate and entire leaflets, up to 10 inches long, attached to a long flexible petiole

Trees for Zone 9b
Warmest parts of Central Florida

From 9b-10b

Mexican Caesalpinia
Caesalpinia yucatanensis

Zone 9b
27°F

Flowering Months: Year round
Leaf Type: Even bipinnate
Flower Color: Yellow
Growth Rate: Medium
Type: Evergreen
Origin: S. Texas and Mexico
Mexican Caesalpinia

Flowering: Episodic bloomer, 3-5 episodes/year. The longest displays in the cool, dry season. Many bumble bees. Mildly, sweetly, fragrant.

Best way to id

Flowers: On racemes to 9" long. Five broad overlapping petals.

Leaves: Alternate, odd-bipinnate, to 12" long with 3-4 opposite pinnae

Fruits: Flat, woody, pods held in clusters

‘Starburst’ Clerodendrum
Clerodendrum quadriloculare

Flowering Months: January-April

Leaf Type: Simple

Dimensions: 15'x10'

Blooming Pattern: Sequential
**Starburst' Clerodendrum**

**Best way to id**

**Flowering:** Excellent and dependable bloomer in full sun. Shorter ID under shade.

**Flowers:** On terminal globose cymes about 12” across. Long tubular flowers to 4.5” long.

**Leaves:** Opposite, simple and entire. Blades 6-15” long. Pointed apex and slightly wavy margins. Dark green with purple tint on top.

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**Purple Glory Tree**

**Tibouchina granulosa**

**Flowering Months:** February-November

**Leaf Type:** Simple

**Growth Rate:** Medium

**Messiness:** Medium

**Type:** Evergreen Tree or shrub

**Origin:** Brazil

**Dimension:** 12’x15’

**Zone 9b**

**26°F**

**Mid June**
**Purple Glory Tree**

*Growth Habit:* Shrub or small-medium sized tree but usually more tree-like in central Florida. Mostly two episodic blooms/year between February-April and July-November. Some plants flower 3/year. Somewhat unpredictable bloomer.

**Best ways to id**

- **Flowers:** Purple or pink on terminal panicles, 4 IBD
- **Leaves:** Simple, opposite, lanceolate-narrowly elliptic, to 8” long and 3” wide
- **Stems:** Winged young stems constantly flake off

**Jacaranda**

*Jacaranda mimosifolia*

- **Flowering months:** Late March-June
- **IBD:** 34
- **Leaf Type:** Bipinnate
- **Messiness:** Low
- **Type:** Briefly Deciduous
- **Flower Color:** Blue, lavender
Jacaranda

Flowering: On pyramidal panicles. Leafless to varying degrees before flowering. Flower April-June with as many as two months between early and late bloomers. Some bloom for some trees. Some trees don't bloom for 20-25 years of age.

Jacaranda Growth

Growth Habit: At about 20 feet, they begin to develop a dome shape. They bloom with or without leaves. Trees that bloom with foliage are longer blooming.

Jacaranda

Underview: Early May
Jacaranda
Best ways to id

Fruits: Nearly round, two-celled, tarry dehiscent

Apple Blossom Tree
Cassia javanica

Zone 9b
25°F

Flowering Months: April-September
Leaf Type: Even bipinnate

Flower Color: Rose-Pink
Messiness: Moderate when flowering

Growth Rate: Fast
Type: Briefly deciduous

Dimension: 40' x 50'
Origin: S. Texas and Mexico

Apple Blossom

Undervine: Abundant rose-pink flowers that fade to pale pink. 17.5 DD
Apple Blossom Tree

Best way to id

Flowering:
On short, stiff crowded racemes up to 7” long. Rose-pink, fades to pale pink. Slightly fragrant. April-September but mostly May-June for IBD.

Leaves:
Alternate, even-pinnate, up to 27” long with 5-17 pairs of opposite, glossy, elliptic to oblong elliptic leaflets. Young leaflets are densely downy.

Royal Poinciana

Delonix regina

Zone 9b
25°F

Flowering Months: Late April-September
Flower Color: Red, yellow
Growth Rate: Fast
Dimension: 50 x 75'

Leaf Type: Even-pinnate
Messiness: High when flowering
Type: Most are deciduous in Spring
Origin: Madagascar
Leafless trees in winter-spring signals excellent late spring and summer bloom.

Best way to id flowering:
Arranged on racemes up to 10” long. Florets up to 5” wide with 5 red or yellow petals, the standard petal splashed with burgundy spots. Late April – September. 39 IBD.
Royal Poinciana

Best way to id

Leaves: Alternate, even-pinnate, up to 26" long 10-25 pairs of opposite pinnae

Fruits: Pods, long, hard, flat, slightly curved, to 26" long. Indehiscent. Pendent on trees from green to black

Yellow Cordia

Cordia lutea

Flowering Months: April-August
Leaf Type: Alternate, simple
IBD: ?
Messiness: High when flowering
Flower Color: Yellow
Type: Evergreen

The Three Cordias

By order of cold hardness

White Geiger (Cordia boissieri)
Zone 9a, 20°F
50-82 IBD

Yellow Geiger (Cordia lutea)
Zone 9b, 27°F

Orange Geiger (Cordia sebestens)
Zone 9b, 27°F

Orange Geiger (Cordia sebestens)
Zone 9b, 27°F
Golden Showers
*Cassia fistula*

Flowering Months: May-July
IBD: 36
Flower Color: Yellow

Leaf Type: Alternate, even pinnate
Messiness: Moderate in April and May
Type: Deciduous and semi-deciduous

Messiness:

- Moderate in April and May
- Gradually lessens through the summer
- Can cause lawn maintenance problems

Flower Color:

- Initial bloom is yellow
- Subsequent bloom is less spectacular

Growth Habit:

- Leaves begin to fall in April in preparation for flowering
- Branch tips may not flower during severe drought
- A second less spectacular bloom may occur in September with no loss of foliage
- Typical dimension: 30’x30’

Undervine:

- Late May
Golden Shower
Best ways to id

Leaves: Alternate, even pinnate, 12-18" long. Opposite leaflets.

Flowers: Racemes, pendent, 8-16" long. 36 IBD.

Fruits: Pods, long and hanging. To 24" long, 1" diameter. Indehiscent.

Pink Shower Tree
Cassia bakeriana

Flowering Months: Late March-Mid May

IBD: 347

Flower Color: Pink, purple

Leaf Type: Alternate, even pinnate

Messiness: Moderate in March

Type: Deciduous and semi-deciduous

Zone 9b
25°F

Pink Shower Tree

Kenyan/African Cassia
*Cassia afrofistula*

- Flowering Months: June-August
- Leaf Type: Alternate, even pinnate
- Messiness: Low
- Flower Color: Yellow
- Type: Evergreen

**Growth Habit**
Grows to about 30-36 inches after germination. Flowering in 1-2 years. A tree of at least 25 years old.
**Kenyan Cassia**  
*Best way to id*  

- **Leaves:** Alternate, even-pinnate, to 16 inches long.  
- **Flowers:** On upright terminal racemes, 3-6 inches long.  
- **Fruits:** Pods, indehiscent to 20" long. Many cross-walls each with a single seed.

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**Hong Kong Orchid**  
*Bauhinia blakeana*  

- **Zone:** 9b  
- **Temperature:** 26°F  
- **Flowering months:** Late October-March  
- **IBD:** 117  
- **Messiness:** High when flowering  
- **Flower Color:** Rose purple to orchid pink  
- **Leaf Type:** Simple, entire, bilobed  
- **Type:** Evergreen but heavy leaf loss at end of the blooming season

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**Pruning Lesson:** Flowers the same year even after a hard pruning. Flowers on new growth.
Hong Kong Orchid
Best ways to id

Hong Kong Orchid

Leaves: Alternate, simple, broadly ovate to subcircular, notched to 0.25 to 0.5 its length, mostly 5.5-7.5 inches long and 4.0 to 6.5 inches wide.

Trees for Zone 10a
Coldest parts of South Florida

From 10a-10b
Shaving Brush Tree
Pseudobombax ellipticum

Flowering Months: February-April
Leaf Type: Alternate, palmate
Growth Rate: Fast
Dimension: 30' x 40'

Messiness: High in February-April
Type: Leafless from February-May

Zone: 10a
28°F

Shaving Brush Tree

Full bloom. Late April
New foliage. Early June

Shaving Brush Tree

Underview: Mid-March
**Shaving Brush Tree**

**Best ways to id**

**Flowers:** Cigar-like flower buds. Stamnous flowers with many red or white stamens, coiled petals. 16 IBD

**Early May**

**Jamaican Dogwood**

*Piscidia piscipula*

**Flowering months:** May-July

**Flower color:** Lavender-white

**Messiness:** Moderate when flowering

**Growth Rate:** Fast

**Zone 10a**

**30°F**
Jamaican Dogwood

Flowering: The flowering period is short (15 IBD), usually done by end of May. On crowded panicles, 3”-4” long with as many as 140 flowers.

Underview: Some tree leafless while flowering, others with full compliment of new leaves. Late May.

15 IBD

Best ways to id

Leaves: Alternate, pinnate

Flowers: Panicles, beginning in May. 15 IBD

Fruits: Pods with 4 irregular wings develop rapidly. Fully developed by end of July

30
**Vera Wood/Bulnesia**  
*Bulnesia arborea*

**Zone:** 10a  
**Temperature:** 30°F

**Flowering Months:** April-October  
**Flower Color:** Yellow-orange

**Leaf Type:** Pinnate  
**Growth Rate:** Medium

**Flower Type:** Evergreen  
**Dimension:** 30'x40'

**Origin:** Columbia, Venezuela

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**Vera Wood**  
**Best ways to id**

- **Flowers:** Episodic, abundant, golden yellow  
  - Early May

- **Leaves:** Opposite, even pinnate, bright olive green to 5" long
Vera Wood
Best ways to id

Fruits: Samaras, circular in 5 distinct parts

Silk-Floss Tree
Ceiba speciosa

Zone 10a
29°F

Flowering Months: Sept. - December
Flower Color: Mostly with pink streaks
Growth Rate: Fast

Leaf Type: Alternate, palmate
Messiness: High when flowering
Type: Deciduous

Growth Habit: Fast growing, trunks and branches with stout spines
Underview: Leafless at bloom. No flowers by December and deciduous until March of the following year.

Flowering: Solitary or in groups with many large flower buds. 35 IBD

Flowers: On racemes, five petals with mostly pink but also streaked with yellow or white. Lighter colored centers. 35 IBD
Silk-Floss Tree

Best ways to id

Fruits: Capsules, woody, oblong, green and dehiscent. To about 8 inches long. Seed embedded in white fiber. Mid January - Late March

Fruits: Cottony mass is a potential mess in late March. Notice emerging leaves.

Leaves: Alternate, palmate, on long petioles, with 5-7 narrowly serrated margins, elliptic leaflets

Silk-Floss Tree

Leaves: Alternate, palmate, on long petioles, with 5-7 narrowly serrated margins, elliptic leaflets

Silk-Floss Tree

Best ways to id

Trunks: Spiny, may lose spines with age. Trunk becomes bulbous.
The Six Bombax/Ceibas/Pachira
By order of cold hardiness

- **Red Silk Cotton (Bombax ceiba)**
  - Zone 9a, 20°F.
  - 26 IBD

- **Shaving Brush Tree (Pseudobombax ellipticum)**
  - Zone 10a, 28°F.
  - 16 IBD

- **White Silk Floss Tree (Ceiba insignis)**
  - Zone 10a, 28°F.
  - 41 IBD

- **Silk-Floss Tree (Ceiba speciosa)**
  - Zone 10a, 29°F.
  - 35 IBD

- **Kapok Tree (Ceiba pentandra)**
  - Zone 10a, 30°F.
  - 17 IBD

- **Malabar Chestnut (Pachira aquatica)**
  - Zone 10b, 33°F

**Queen Crape Myrtle**
*Lagerstroemia speciosa*

- **Flowering Months:** May-Mid October
- **Leaf Type:** Opposite or alternate, entire, simple
- **Messiness:** High before flowering
- **Growth Rate:** Medium
- **Type:** Deciduous
- **Dimension:** 35' x 50'
Queen's Crape Myrtle
Medium growth rate
May, 2012

Queen's Crape Myrtle
Deciduous
30 May

Queen's Crape Myrtle
Best way to id
Flowering: On axillary (pertaining to the leaf axils) and terminal panicles up to 28" long.
Queen’s Crape Myrtle
Best way to id

Flowers: 2-2.5” wide with six purple, lavender, and rarely white crinkled petals. 40-80

Queen’s Crape Myrtle
Best way to id

Fruits: Capsules, ovoid or ellipsoid, woody, to 1.25” across. Persistent.

Golden Rain Tree September-October 17
Silk-Floss October-November 35
Hong Kong Orchid November-March 117
Purple Trumpet Tree January-March 21
Starburst Clerodend. January-April 33
Asoka (Saraca) January-May
Texas Wild Olive January-December 56-82
Red-Silk Cotton February-March 28
Mex. Casapidinia Feb-March, episodic 20-65
Silver-Trumpet March-April 16
Shaving-Brush Tree March-April 16

Sequential In-Season Flowering
Stephen H. Brown is the Horticulture Extension Agent with Lee County Extension located in southwest Florida.

brownsh@leegov.com
http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml