

Flowering Trees of *Florida*



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Contents

Note: Not all trees covered in this book have a common name. When available, the common name is listed in this table of contents.

Preface 6

The Naming of Florida 7

In Tribute 8

Botanical Names 10

***Albizia* 12**

Silk Tree 12

***Bauhinia* 14**

Hong Kong Orchid 16

Fall Orchid Tree 17

Mountain Ebony 19

Pink Orchid Tree 21

Bauhinia aculeata 23

Dwarf White Bauhinia 24

African Red Bauhinia 25

Pata de Vaca 26

Yellow Bell Bauhinia 27

Bauhinia grandidieri 28

Menninger's Bauhinia 29

North Indian Bauhinia 29

***Bombax* 30**

Red Silk Cotton 30

Shaving Brush Tree 32

Rhodognaphalon 35

***Brownea* 36**

Scarlet Flame Bean 37

Rose of Venezuela 37

***Bulnesia* 38**

Vera Wood 38

***Caesalpinia* 40**

Dwarf Poinciana 40

Brazilian Ironwood 42

Caesalpinia vesicaria 43

Mexican Poinciana 44

***Cassia* 46**

Golden Shower 47

Pink Shower 49

East African Cassia 50

Golden Medallion Tree 51

Winter Cassia 52

***Chorisia* 54**

Silk Floss Tree 54

Chorisia insignis 57

***Cochlospermum* 58**

Buttercup Tree 58

***Cordia* 60**

Geiger Tree 60

Texas Wild Olive 62

Yellow Cordia 63

Brazilian Cordia 64

***Crateva* 66**

Sacred Garlic Pear 66

***Delonix* 68**

Royal Poinciana 70

***Erythrina* 72**

Tiger Claw 74

Kafferboom 75

Cry Baby Tree 76

***Guaiacum* 78**

Lignum Vitae 79

Guaiacum officinale 79

***Jacaranda* 82**

Jacaranda mimosifolia 83

Jacaranda cuspidifolia 84

Jacaranda jasminoides 85

***Koelreuteria* 86**

Golden Rain Tree 87

Koelreuteria elegans 88

Hardy Golden Rain Tree 88

***Lagerstroemia* 89**

Crape Myrtle 89

Queens Crape Myrtle 90

Lagerstroemia loudonii 92

Lagerstroemia floribunda 93

***Lonchocarpus* 94**

Lance Pod 94

***Nerium* 96**

Oleander 96

***Parkinsonia* 100**

Jerusalem Thorn 100

***Peltophorum* 102**

Copper Pod 102

Peltophorum dubium 104

Peltophorum africanum 105

***Sesbania* 106**

Rattle Box 106

***Spathodea* 107**

African Tulip Tree 107

***Tabebuia* 110**

Golden Trumpet Tree 112

Tabebuia chrysantha 114

Tabebuia umbellata 114

Tabebuia ochracea 116

Lavender Ipe 118

Golden Ipe 119

Pink Ipe 120

Cuban Trumpet 121

Silver Trumpet Tree 122

***Tecoma* 124**

Yellow Elder 124

***Tibouchina* 127**

Purple Glory Tree 127

Princess Flower 128

Tibouchina grandifolia 128

***Tipuana* 130**

Tipu 130

Leaf Comparison 132

**Selecting and Planting a
Flowering Tree 134**

Temperature Trends 136

Hardiness Zones 138

Glossary 139

Bibliography 140

Index 141

Preface

As a boy growing up in northwest New Jersey, I would often observe my father pacing the lawn, watering bucket in hand. He had one of those immaculate lawns with the right plants in the right places. With great anticipation, he looked forward to the bloom cycles of his Forsythia and Rhododendron. To me, these shrubs, with names I could barely pronounce, were just obstacles to the lawn mower and our football games. To my father they were "special" plants that offered an aesthetic gift to those who would pause and take notice.

Eventually my wife and I moved to an acre of land in Florida. Being an avid woodworker, I discovered that many of the world's exotic timbers come from tropical ornamental flowering trees that will grow in the subtropical peninsula of Florida. It was time to see if I had inherited my father's green thumb.

Florida presents some unique challenges and opportunities in the growing of unusual trees. I tried to do some research, but there are few books that adequately cover this topic. I was fortunate to make the acquaintance of nursery owners, horticulturists, and friends in the Tropical Flowering Tree Society of Miami who have been willing to share their knowledge. After deciding to write this book, I spent several years researching and traveling around the state photographing trees.

Of the 74 genera covered in this book, only a few are native to Florida. Most are more spectacular trees from the tropical parts of the world, chosen for their ability to adapt to Florida's subtropical climate with a little understanding and care. I was tempted to include *Plumeria* (also called Frangipani), *Camellia*, and *Hibiscus*, but these have many hybrids and have been well-covered in other books as well as having their own plant societies (see listings on the World Wide Web).

Today I can understand my father's enthusiasm for these great works of nature. I anxiously anticipate the springtime blooms of my *Tabebuia* and *Jacaranda* trees and the fall blossoming of *Bauhinia*, *Chorisia*, and *Tecoma*. I might add that my son wonders why his dad spends so much time looking at trees.

The Naming of Florida

In the spring of 1513, Juan Ponce de León sailed north from Puerto Rico to search for the island of Bimini and the legendary fountain of youth. On April 2, his ships dropped anchor in what is now the St. Augustine inlet. He claimed the land for Spain and named it *La Florida* after the Easter celebration of flowers, *Pascua Florida*. On April 3, he went ashore.



Loblolly Bay

Many history books neglect to mention this Easter connection and make reference to Florida as the “Land of Flowers.” However, central and south Florida have very few native flowering trees, and to travel Florida’s many miles of highways is to witness vast tracks of pine forests intermixed with palmetto-laden plains. It wasn’t until the early- to mid-twentieth century that some of the world’s greatest flowering trees were introduced to the Florida landscape. A nice native Florida tree seen growing today in moist or wet forests in central Florida is *Gordonia lasianthus*, or “Loblolly Bay.”