UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

ENH266

Caesalpinia pulcherrima: Dwarf Poinciana[1]

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Introduction

Brilliant scarlet and yellow flowers, feathery foliage, and quick growth make dwarf poinciana a popular evergreen shrub. It is hard to find a more attractive flower. Also known as Barbados flower fence, this open-branched, fine-textured shrub will tolerate hot, dry areas, and forms an effective thorny barrier. It flowers year-round with peak displays in spring and fall.



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*: Dwarf Poinciana
Credits: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*
Pronunciation: sez-al-PIN-ee-uh pul-KAIR-ih-muh
Common name(s): Dwarf poinciana, Barbados flower fence
Family: *Leguminosae*
USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: reclamation; specimen
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree



Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 8 to 12 feet
Spread: 10 to 12 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular
Crown shape: round
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine

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Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: bipinnately compound, even-pinnately compound
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: oblong, elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: reticulate, pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: less than 2-inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

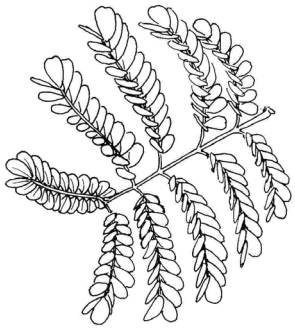


Figure 3. Foliage

Flower

Flower color: red, yellow, orange
Flower characteristics: very showy

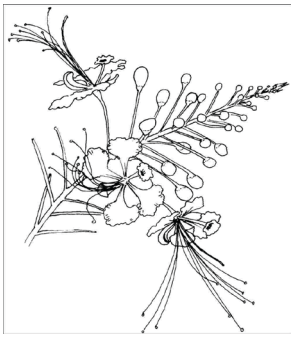


Figure 4. Flower

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like
Fruit length: 3- to 6-inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

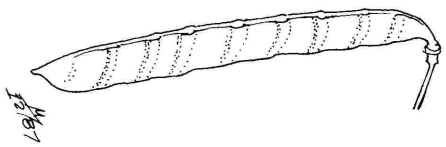


Figure 5. Fruit

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage
Current year twig color: green, brown
Current year twig thickness: thick
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; alkaline; well drained
Drought tolerance: high
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: yes
Outstanding tree: no
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Ozone sensitivity: unknown
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Full sun is preferred for best flowering, but some shade is tolerated. Any soil is suitable as long as it is well drained. Dwarf poinciana is perfectly suited to informal plantings. This is a beautiful, refreshing addition to any garden or yard as a specimen or as an accent toward the middle or back of a shrub border. Tipping the branches during the growing season creates a fuller shrub and more flowers. With some training and pruning, you can create a small, 12- to 15-foot-tall multi-stemmed tree, but the natural form is a low-branched, full, wides preading shrub about 10-feet tall and wide. Allow plenty of room for this plant to develop as a shrub.

Propagation is by seed, which germinate faster if scarified or soaked in hot water.

Pests

Scale will present an occasional problem.

Diseases

Dwarf Poinciana is susceptible to mushroom root rot, especially in poorly drained soil.