

Delonix regia: Royal Poinciana¹

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Introduction

This many-branched, broad, spreading, flat-crowned deciduous tree is well-known for its brilliant display of red-orange bloom, literally covering the tree tops from May to July. There is nothing like a royal poinciana (or better yet, a group of them) in full bloom. The fine, soft, delicate leaflets afford dappled shade during the remainder of the growing season, making royal poinciana a favorite shade tree or freestanding specimens in large, open lawns. The tree is often broader than tall, growing about 40 feet high and 60 feet wide. Trunks can become as large as 50 inches or more in diameter. One to two-foot-long, dark brown seed pods hang on the tree throughout the winter, then fall on the ground in spring creating a nuisance.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Delonix regia*: royal poinciana

General Information

Scientific name: *Delonix regia*

Pronunciation: dee-LOE-nicks REE-jee-uh

Common name(s): royal poinciana

Family: *Fabaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)

Origin: native to Madagascar

UF/IFAS Invasive Assessment Status: caution, may be recommended but manage to prevent escape (South); not considered a problem species at this time, may be recommended (North, Central)

Uses: street without sidewalk; specimen; shade; reclamation; urban tolerant

Description

Height: 35 to 40 feet

Spread: 40 to 60 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical

Crown shape: vase, spreading

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

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Figure 2. Range

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: bipinnately compound; made up of 10 to 20 pairs of primary leaflets and each are made up of 25 to 35 pairs of secondary leaflets

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: oblong

Leaf venation: unknown

Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen

Leaf blade length: 8 to 20 inches; leaflets are ½ inch

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Leaf—*Delonix regia*: royal poinciana

Flower

Flower color: bright red or orange

Flower characteristics: very showy; emerges in clusters at the ends of branches

Flowering: spring to early fall



Figure 4. Flower—*Delonix regia*: royal poinciana

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated, flat, pod or pod-like

Fruit length: 1 to 2 feet

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: dark brown

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Fructing: late summer

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically multi-trunked; no thorns

Bark: light brown and smooth, becoming slightly roughened and spotted with age

Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage

Current year twig color: green, brown

Current year twig thickness: medium, thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: low



Figure 5. Fruit—*Delonix regia*: royal poinciana



Figure 6. Bark—*Delonix regia*: royal poinciana
Credits: Gitta Hasing

Other

Roots: can form large surface roots

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: yes

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Royal poinciana will provide fullest flowering and best growth when planted in full sun locations. Tolerant of a wide variety of soils and conditions, royal poinciana needs to be well-watered until established, then only during the severest droughts. Grass grows poorly beneath poinciana. Do not plant closer than about 10 feet from pavement or sidewalks, since large surface roots often grow beneath them and can destroy them. Early pruning is required to encourage development of branches which are well-attached to the trunk. This will help compensate for the weak wood. Train the tree so the major limbs are located 8 to 12 feet from the ground to allow for adequate clearance beneath the tree. To develop a strong, durable tree, prune major limbs to prevent them from growing to more than half the diameter of the trunk.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern although caterpillars can eat some foliage. There is a root fungus which can kill a weakened tree.

References

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