

# Ten Common Flowering Trees of the Tampa Bay Area<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This article serves as a quick reference for some of the most common flowering trees found in north and central Florida. Though many species of flowering trees are present in the Florida landscape, data from the city of Tampa shows that the 10 species included here account for 87 percent of flowering trees currently inventoried (TampaTreeMap.org). As such, this guide serves as an efficient resource for master gardeners, novice tree inventory crews, 4-H forestry teams, and others interested in basic flowering tree identification. When these flowering trees are in bloom these species serve as key focal points in urban landscape designs and may have left you wondering, *Wow, what tree is that?*

If you are interested in identifying trees beyond the flowering species showcased in this article, the University of Florida offers a comprehensive key and tree identification field guide, *Trees: North and Central Florida* (Koeser et al. 2014).

## Ten Common Flowering Trees in the Tampa Bay Area

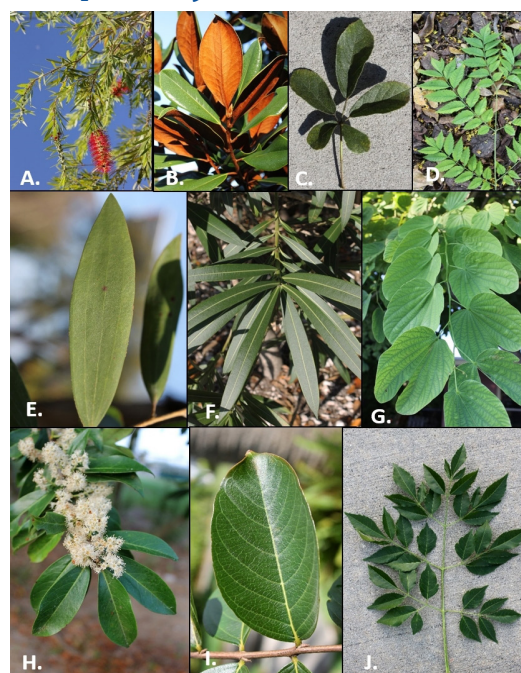


Figure 1. Leaf detail of trees: A.) Bottlebrush Tree (*Melaleuca viminalis*); B.) Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*); C.) Golden Trumpet Tree (*Handroanthus chrysotrichus*); D.) Golden Raintree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*); E.) Melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*); F.) Oleander (*Nerium oleander*); G.) Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia variegata*); H.) Carolina Cherry Laurel (*Prunus caroliniana*); I.) Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*); J. Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*)

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## Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia variegata*)



Family: Fabaceae or Leguminosae, legume family  
Florida Hardiness Zones: 9b–11

Height: 20–40'

Width: 25–35'

Leaf: 4–6" wide, simple, alternate, orbicular, deeply notched or two-lobed at the apex, cordate or heart-shaped base, and has entire margins. Leaves are bright to dull green and are semi-evergreen to deciduous.

Bark: Gray and smooth to slightly rough

Flower: 3–5" long, fragrant, purplish to white, appears orchid-like, and emerges in clusters at branch tips

Flowering: Late winter to early summer

Fruit: 6–9" long, flattened, brown pod

Native Range: India, Vietnam, and southeastern China. *Invasive Caution*—may be recommended but should be managed to prevent its escape for both North and Central Florida by IFAS assessment.

Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Oleander (*Nerium oleander*)

Family: Apocynaceae, oleander family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 9a–11

Height: 10–18', multi-stemmed and readily sucker sprouts

Width: 10–15'

Leaf: 2–8" long, simple, opposite or whorled, linear to lanceolate, with entire margins. Leaves are dark green on



top, paler green underneath, leathery in texture, and are evergreen.

Bark: Grey, smooth, becoming shallowly fissured with age, and broken leaves and twigs excrete a milky sap

Flower: 1–2"; white, yellow, pink, red, or purple; and emerges in clusters on terminal cymes

Flowering: Primarily spring and fall, but may also occur year-round

Fruit: 3–6" long, dry, hard, black, pod

Fruiting: Summer and fall

Native Range: Southern Asia and Mediterranean. Not a problem species and may be recommended in North and Central Florida as indicated by the IFAS Assessment (UF/IFAS 2015).

Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Golden Raintree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)

Family: Sapindaceae, soapberry family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 8a–9b

Height: 30–40'

Width: 30–40'





Leaf: 6–18" long, odd-pinnately compound, and alternate. Leaflets are 1–4" long; ovate or oblong; have lobed, incised, or toothed margins; and sit 7–15 along the rachis. Leaflets are green and shiny on top, nearly glabrous underneath with pubescence along veins, turn yellow in the fall, and are deciduous.

Bark: Light gray to brown, becoming ridged and furrowed with age

Flower: 1½" wide, yellow, and emerges in clusters on 12–15" long panicles

Flowering: Late spring to early summer

Fruit: 1½–2" long, papery, three-valved capsule that turns from green to brown when mature

Fruiting: Late summer to early fall

Native Range: Northern China and Korea. This species has not yet been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment (UF/IFAS 2015). Without this assessment, the temporary conclusion is that this is not a problem species at this time and may be used in Florida.

Habitat: Full sun, well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*)

Family: Lythraceae, loosestrife family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 8a–9a

Height: 10–30'

Width: 15–25'

Leaf: 1–3" long, simple, opposite or subopposite, obovate or elliptic, with entire margins. Leaves are dark green on top;



pale green underneath; turn yellow, orange, and red in the fall; and are deciduous.

Bark: Smooth, tan-orange, and flakes off in patches to reveal shades of brown, green, and reddish-brown

Flower: Small; crinkled-looking; and emerges in clusters of white, pink, red, or purple on 8–10"-long panicles

Flowering: Late spring to summer

Fruit: 1/4–1/2" long, brown, woody, egg-shaped capsule

Fruiting: Persists through winter

Native Range: Asia and northern Australia. Crapemyrtle has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment (UF/IFAS 2015). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus, it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.

Habitat: Full sun, well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*)

Family: Magnoliaceae, magnolia family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 8a–10a

Height: 60–80'

Width: 30–40'

Leaf: 4–8" long, simple, alternate, oval to elliptic, with entire margins. Leaves are stiff; thick; dark green and glabrous on



top; paler green and covered with a dense, rusty pubescence underneath; and are evergreen.

Bark: Gray and smooth, developing scaly plates with age

Flower: 6–8" wide, creamy white, very fragrant, and saucer-shaped

Flowering: Spring and summer

Fruit: 3–5" long, cone-like, pubescent, aggregate of follicles that turn from green to red with maturity. Each follicle splits to reveal a bright red, drupe-like aril.

Fruiting: Fall

Native Range: Southeastern United States

Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, well-drained to occasionally wet soil, moderate drought tolerance, and high aerosol salt tolerance

## Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*)

Family: Meliaceae, mahogany family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 8a–10b

Height: 30–40'

Width: 15–25'

Leaf: 1–2' long, bipinnately compound, alternate, with primary and secondary leaflets having opposite arrangement. Secondary leaflets are 1–2 1/2" long, oval to ovate, have pointed tips, and have coarsely serrated margins.

Leaflets are dark green on top, paler green underneath, turn yellow in the fall, and are deciduous.

Bark: Reddish-brown and smooth, becoming slightly fissured with age

Flower: 1/2–1" across, lavender or purplish, fragrant, and emerges in clusters on 8"-long branched panicles

Flowering: Spring

Fruit: 1/3–3/4", round, yellow, fleshy drupe

Fruiting: Summer

Native Range: India, China, and the Himalayas. Invasive—Invasive and not recommended for North and Central Florida by IFAS assessment (UF/IFAS 2015).

Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Golden Trumpet Tree (*Handroanthus chrysotrichus*, syn. *Tabebuia chrysotricha*)

Family: Bignoniaceae, bignonia family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 10a–11

Height: 25–35'

Width: 25–35'

Leaf: Palmately compound and opposite or subopposite. Leaflets are 4" long, oblong or elliptic, have mostly entire





Width: 20–30'

Leaf/Needle: 4" long, simple, alternate, lanceolate to narrowly elliptic, and with entire margins. Leaves are grayish-green, have 6–7 veins running parallel to the mid-vein, have an aroma similar to camphor when crushed, and are evergreen.

Bark: Outer bark is white and soft, and peels to reveal reddish inner bark

Flower: 1–3" long, white, has a musty fragrance, and emerges in clusters on spikes that resemble a bottle brush

Flowering: Spring and summer, but also capable year round

Fruit: 3/8", cylindrical, woody capsule

Origin: Australia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. This species is prohibited from use in Florida according to the Federal Noxious Weed List, the Noxious Weed List of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, or the Prohibited Aquatic and Wetland Plants List of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. It is considered invasive and not recommended for North and Central Florida by IFAS Assessment (UF/IFAS 2015).

Habitat: Full sun to partial shade, wet to well-drained soil, and low aerosol salt tolerance

## **Bottlebrush Tree (*Melaleuca viminalis*)**

Family: Myrtaceae, myrtle family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 9b–11

Height: 15–20', and multi-stemmed

Width: 15–20'

margins but can be slightly toothed at the apex, and sit five per leaf. Young leaflets are covered in a golden pubescence, then become silvery green on top and tan and pubescent underneath, and are semi-evergreen or deciduous.

Bark: Tan, smooth, with shallow vertical fissures when young, becoming rougher and more deeply set with age

Flower: 2" long, bright yellow, trumpet-shaped, and emerges in clusters at the ends of branches

Flowering: Early spring; before new leaves emerge

Fruit: 4–15" long, brown pod, covered in a gold or reddish velvety pubescence

Fruiting: Shortly after flowering

Native Range: Brazil and northeast Argentina. This species has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment (UF/IFAS 2015). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.

Habitat: Full sun, well-drained soil, and moderate drought and aerosol salt tolerance

## **Melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*)**

Family: Myrtaceae, myrtle family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 9b–11

Height: 40–100', and forms dense stands



Leaf/Needle: 3–4" long, simple, alternate, lanceolate to linear, and with entire margins. Leaves are pale-green, aromatic, and are evergreen.

Bark: Dark grey, furrowed, and shaggy or exfoliating in vertical strips

Flower: Small, with numerous bright red cylindrical stamens, and emerges in clusters on 3–5" long spikes that resemble a bottlebrush

Flowering: Spring, summer, and sometimes into early winter

Fruit: <math>1/2</math>" round, brown, woody, cup-like capsule

Origin: East coast of Australia. This species has been evaluated using the IFAS Assessment (UF/IFAs 2015). This species is not documented in any undisturbed natural areas in Florida. Thus it is not considered a problem species and may be used in Florida.

Habitat: Full sun, moist but well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Carolina Laurel Cherry (*Prunus caroliniana*)

Family: Rosaceae, rose family

Florida Hardiness Zones: 8a–10a

Height: 25–40', and thicket forming

Width: 15–25'

Leaf/Needle: 2–4" long, simple, alternate, elliptic, with entire to sharply toothed margins. Leaves are dark green and shiny on top, dull green underneath, fragrant when crushed, are attached to a red petiole, and are evergreen.

Bark: Reddish-brown, smooth, and peppered with lenticels when young, then darkens to grey or almost black, and splits and fissures with age

Flower: Small, white, fragrant, and emerges on 2–3"-long racemes

Flowering: Winter

Fruit:  $1/3$ – $1/2$ ", black, oval, shiny, drupe

Fruiting: Spring and summer

Origin: Southeastern United States, in addition to east Texas

Habitat: Full sun to full shade, well-drained soil, high drought tolerance, and moderate aerosol salt tolerance

## Conclusion

While this article can be helpful in identifying these 10 flowering trees commonly found in the Tampa Bay area, a more complete and in depth resource is available for those interested in furthering their tree identification abilities. The UF/IFAS Extension and Center for Landscape Conservation and Ecology offer a comprehensive and densely-photographed field guide featuring 140 trees and palms of north and central Florida. Available as both a mobile application and printed book, *Trees: North and Central Florida* features a full dichotomous key (a handy tool to help identify an unknown organism using a sequence of paired, either-or choices) and accompanying glossary.

## Reference

Koeser, A. K., G. Hasing, M. H. Friedman, and R. B. Irving. 2014. *Trees: North and Central Florida*. Gainesville, FL: UF/IFAS Communication Services.

UF/IFAS. 2015. *Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas*. <http://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

## Glossary

**Alternate**—pertaining to bud or leaf arrangement, one leaf or bud at each node, situated at alternating positions along the stem. In this arrangement, the leaves are not directly across from each other.

**Apex**—the tip, end, or angular limit of an object; for example, the tip of a leaf or shoot

**Bipinnately compound leaves**—a compound leaf that has leaflets arranged on side branches off the main extended petiole (rachis).

**Compound**—leaf with two or more leaflets.

**Cordate**—heart-shaped.

**Elliptic**—having a narrow oval shape.

**Entire**—term describing a leaf margin without teeth.

**Glabrous**—free of hairs or pubescence; smooth.

**Lanceolate**—shaped like a lance head; having a narrow oval shape tapering to a point at each end.

**Lobed**—having leaf segments that project outward, creating voids between the segments.

**Obovate**—tear-drop shaped leaf attached to the petiole at the tapered end.

**Once-compound leaves**—a compound leaf that has leaflets attached directly to an extended petiole (rachis).

**Opposite**—pertaining to leaf or branch arrangement, leaves or branches situated two at each node, across from each other on the stem.

**Orbicular**—circular.

**Palmately compound**—type of compound leaf with veins or leaflets radiating in a fanlike pattern.

**Pubescence**—short, soft hairs covering the surface of leaves or other plant parts.

**Serrate**—saw-tooth margin of a leaf, with the teeth pointed forward.

**Simple**—single-bladed leaf, not composed of leaflets.