**Heliconia spp. Heliconia**¹

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**Introduction**

The many species of Heliconia are rainforest herbs that occur within the understory or densely at the forest periphery (Fig. 1). A few rapidly colonize temporary tree fall gaps or occur in the open along streams or in disturbed areas. They range from not much more than 1.5 feet in height to nearly 15 feet tall. The relatively inconspicuous flowers are borne in extravagantly colored bracts that are waxy and long lasting and have become high-priced tropical cut flowers. Some of the species bear pendant inflorescences, and these can be as long as several feet.

**General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Heliconia* spp.

**Pronunciation:** hel-lick-KOE-nee-uh species

**Common name(s):** Heliconia

**Family:** Heliconiaceae

**Plant type:** herbaceous

**USDA hardiness zones:** 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** cut flowers; suitable for growing indoors

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant


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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

### Description

**Height:** 2 to 15 feet  
**Spread:** 3 to 6 feet  
**Plant habit:** upright  
**Plant density:** open  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate  
**Leaf type:** simple  
**Leaf margin:** entire  
**Leaf shape:** ovate  
**Leaf venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
**Leaf blade length:** more than 36 inches

**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** red; yellow; orange  
**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering; summer flowering

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** unknown  
**Fruit length:** unknown  
**Fruit cover:** unknown  
**Fruit color:** blue  
**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Heliconia spp. Heliconia

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

Use and Management

As landscape plants, many Heliconia species are less desirable because of their spreading nature and the tendency of the leaves to become tattered along the veins by wind. H. psittacorum (to 5 feet tall) and its many hybrids (known as Parakeet Flowers), are frequently used as landscape perennials. However, their aggressive spreading nature requires effective root barriers to keep the rhizomes from extending into areas where the plant is not wanted. H. caribaea, well-adapted to alkaline soils, is a tall-grower (to 12 feet) with deep red-bracted inflorescences borne on 2 year old stems. The many varieties of H. stricta rarely grow taller than 3 feet. Heliconias as a group impart an unmistakable tropical look to the garden. Heliconias can be used as specimen plants or they can be massed together in groups.

Heliconia species should be grown in full sun to partial shade on a well-drained soil. These perennials have no drought or salt tolerance but will endure wet soils. When these plants are occasionally frozen in the warm parts of Florida, the tops will die back to the ground, but roots will regenerate new shoots with the coming of warm weather.

Propagate the Heliconia species by division.

Pests and Management

These species are relatively pest tolerant.