HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

TREE FOR ALL SEASONS

Spring is here! All the new plant growth and beautiful blossoms make it apparent that the seasons have changed and winter is behind us.

One of the most wonderful sights you may be noticing is the tabebuia trees. These trees are now in full bloom, with their large pink or yellow trumpet-like flowers.

Native to the islands of the West Indies, the tabebuia is a bit sensitive to cold. However, this tree seems to have found many ideal places in Osceola County to thrive.

The tabebuia is a deciduous tree that grows to be 50 feet tall and has a relatively open canopy, spreading 15 to 25 feet wide. The sparse branching does not make it a great shade tree, but does allow for turf and other sun-loving plants to grow beneath it.

Even in winter when the tabebuia has shed all its leaves, it is still a lovely specimen, with its silvery gray bark and pyramidal form.

In the spring, the tree wakes from its dormancy with a beautiful show. 2 inch-wide blossoms coat the canopy of the tree and stand out nicely against the gray bark. There are still no leaves on the tree, adding to the grandeur of the flowers.

As the tabebuia sheds its flowers, it creates a blanket of color under the canopy of the tree. This is yet another beautiful show that the tree provides, at least until the blossoms on the ground begin to decline and need to be cleaned up.

When the flowers depart, the attractive foliage of the tabebuia begins to grow. The leaves are palmately compound and have five leaflets, each about 2½ inches long. They will remain on the tree until the colder, winter months return.

The tabebuia needs to be grown in a sunny location. Preferably it should be grown in a rich, well-drained soil, though it can survive in a variety of soils.

A tropical tree, it can be damaged by freezing temperatures. Finding the right location is key to the winter survival of this tree. By planting the tree in a protected area, shielded by the northern exposure, the damage of the tree from winter weather can be decreased.

Pruning is usually only required during the early years of the tree to create a strong structure. After a dominant trunk is formed, the tree can be left to take its natural form. If pruning is needed for cosmetic or safety concerns, it can be done. Prune major limbs so they remain about one-half the diameter of the trunk. This will allow them to remain well secured to the trunk. Pests, including insects and diseases, are of little concern for this tree. None have been found to be a major problem.

This ornamental tree is great for planting along a boulevard or residential street where there is plenty of soil space for root development.

It is also good for small yards, where a nice medium-sized tree is wanted. This is a tree you will want to keep around, once you see it in flower.

For more information on the tabebuia or if you have other plant questions contact Osceola County Master Gardeners, who now have extended plant-clinic hours. They are now available to take calls, Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm.
The Osceola County Garden School continues for one final week of classes. Tuesday's topic is citrus; other fruit and landscape pitfalls will be discussed Thursday. A tree and shrub-pruning workshop will be Saturday. Call 321-697-3000 to register for the free classes.

Jennifer Welshans
Horticulture Agent
Osceola County Extension Service
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
jwel2@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
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