Flowering trees add color and beauty to the landscape. As you drive around town, look up to enjoy their attractive flowers and foliage.

Crape myrtles, known scientifically as *Lagerstroemia indica*, are cold hardy summer flowering trees. Flowers are born in large panicles or clusters at the tips of new growth during the summer months. Colors vary from white, pale pink, dark pink, lavender, purple and watermelon red. The leaves turn gold or red in the fall before they drop off. The trunk has peeling bark which adds character in the winter when it is almost leafless. Spring new growth has a reddish tint.

These plants make spectacular small trees for patios and areas near the home. Don't plant any closer than 10' to allow for mature growth. Some prefer to plant them as a hedge with several trees in a row. Be sure to select varieties which are tolerant of powdery mildew. University of Florida circular ENH-52 has a listing by size, color and mildew tolerance.

Crape myrtles sometimes have a problem with a small sucking insect called aphids. These aphids are specific to crape myrtle and don't affect other plants. The are preyed upon by many other beneficial insects so they are rarely a problem for tree health. The University of Florida advocates planting crape myrtles because the aphids attract many beneficial insects which then migrate to eat other pest insects in your yard.

Another favorite summer flowering trees is called the golden rain tree for the large sprays of small yellow flowers. Golden rain trees, *Koelreuteria formosiana*, have an umbrella shape when mature. Shrimp colored papery seed pods follow the yellow blooms for a continued color display into the fall.

The good comes with the bad as these seeds sprout easily in flower beds, container gardens and gutters. Consider this carefully before planting this tree as the seedlings establish fast and may be hard to pull up.

Several tropical trees have been gorgeous this spring. The pink and yellow trumpet flowers of tabebuias have been spectacular over the past few months. The trees bloom with no leaves leaving a shower of colorful petals on the ground before leaves appear. There are nearly 100 species of *Tabebuia* but only a few are commonly grown in Florida. Many winters the trees are damaged by freezing temperatures. We have been fortunate the past few winters and mild weather has allowed the trees substantial growth. The colorful display was spectacular in down town Kissimmee and St. Cloud this year. Take warning though. In the past, we have had severe winters which killed mature trees to the ground.

Another unusual tropical tree in bloom now is the cockspur coral tree, *Erythrina crista-galli*. The plant is a member of the pea family so the individual flowers look like large crimson pea flowers in foot long spikes. The tree grows to 25' tall and makes a striking specimen tree. The plant is native to Brazil. The plants are fairly pest-free. Cold is its biggest enemy in our area. It prefers fertile, moist soil in full sun or partial shade.

A relative of the Cockspur coral tree, *Erythrina herbacea*, Cherokee bean, produces red pea like flowers in on foot long spikes. Cherokee bean is native to our area and makes a 3 to 4' shrub. It is quite attractive to hummingbirds when in bloom during May and June.

When visiting EPCOT recently, I noticed *Jacaranda acutifolia* trees, common name jacaranda, in bloom
by the front entrance. This is another spectacular bloomer if it doesn't get frozen. The tree has the potential to grow to 50' in the tropics. I have seen it grow to nearly that height in Kissimmee near the lake where the warming effect of the nearby lakes helps protect it most years.

Tropical trees have potential for providing lots of color in the landscape. Do some research before planting new types so you aren't saddened when winter weather turns drastic. A new plant society helps local garden enthusiasts learn more about flowering trees. Contact John Sullivan, 407-648-2225 of the Flowering Tree Society for information on meeting times and location.

If you haven't gotten a Mother's Day gift yet, consider a flowering tree, a gift which keeps giving year after year.

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