

## Ixora for South Florida<sup>1</sup>

Gail Keeler, Kim Gabel, Rick Schoellhorn<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction



Figure 1. *Ixora*.

*Ixora*, like other acid-loving plants such as hibiscus, gardenia, citrus, and *Allamanda*, can be an attractive landscape plant, but there are a few requirements you need to know to keep *Ixora* healthy and flowering in your yard. All acid-loving plants will require more fertilization management than plants that are adapted to growing in alkaline soils. Mostly this involves being aware of the pH (or acidity) of the soil you are planting in. A pH of around 5 is good for *Ixora*; this pH is slightly lower than for most landscape plants. Avoid planting *Ixora* or any acid-loving plant close to your concrete foundation, and screen soil in planting areas for any concrete

fragments that may cause soil pH to be too high for good plant growth.

When grown under proper conditions, *Ixora* has dark green glossy leaves and colorful flower clusters that bloom year round. *Ixora* is a woody shrub, perennial in zones 10 and 11, and is used as an annual in northern regions. Some varieties have pinkish-red, yellow, or white flowers. Depending on the cultivar, this low-growing evergreen shrub can grow between 3 and 8 feet tall.

*Ixora* can be used for hedges, specimen plants, or can be grown in large planter boxes. It likes full sun but will tolerate light shade. It has medium salt tolerance. Do not overwater.

### Pruning

An annual pruning is usually best to keep your *Ixora* flowering. Try to avoid repeatedly shearing off the tips of the branches, as this kind of pruning removes emerging flower buds so you won't get as many flowers. Any major pruning to shape plants should be done in early spring as plants begin to send out new growth.

1. This document is publication ENH 955, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Published November 2003. Please visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Gail Keeler, Specialist, Extension Projects, UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension; Kim Gabel, Environmental Horticulture Agent II, UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension; Rick Schoellhorn, Floriculture Specialist, UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Department, Gainesville, FL.



Figure 2. *Ixora* flower.

## Planting

Screen native soil of rocks by putting it through half-inch by half-inch hardware cloth. Mix up to 1/3 organic matter such as compost, peat moss, or composted manure into the native soil when planting *Ixora*. Organic matter helps to lower soil pH. Using topsoil exclusively may make it difficult for roots to penetrate the native soil as they grow. Do not plant under an overhang or near downspouts, as rain run-off will damage the plants. It is also a good idea to avoid planting *Ixora* next to concrete walkways or foundations, as concrete surfaces have a very high pH and this can cause problems with *Ixora* growth and flowering. Do not use pea rock as mulch. *Ixora* needs a well-drained site. Apply 3 inches of organic mulch, keeping it away from the trunk.

## Fertilization

*Ixora* grown in alkaline soil is very prone to iron and manganese deficiencies. The symptoms appear on the new foliage as leaves turn yellow or begin yellowing between the leaf veins while the veins remain green. As symptoms continue, leaves may become smaller and the buds may die. Although chelated iron and manganese can be applied to the soil as granular fertilizer, high soil pH prevents most of it from being taken up by the plant. Liquid micronutrients sprayed on the foliage work best for treating the problem. Apply these materials according to the manufacturers' recommendations (mixing with distilled water or rainwater). Protect white surfaces, such as concrete, as the fertilizer will stain them

yellow. Adding organic mulches, applying soil sulfur at recommended rates, and using acidic fertilizers are all ways to help lower high pH.

## Insect Pests

The most common pests of *Ixora* are aphids, scale insects, and mealy bugs. Sooty mold, a black fungus that grows on the excrement of these bugs, can follow. Control of the pests will solve the sooty mold problem. Try using horticultural oil spray to control the insects. Apply weekly for five weeks and you should see improvement. Follow manufacturer's directions. Oil spray is best applied late in the day to reduce damage to leaves by sunburn. Try a small test area first. Nematodes can also be a problem. Mulch around the plant, not coming right up against the trunk, to deter these microscopic soil worms.

## Propagation

*Ixora* can be propagated by tip cuttings of both tender tips and semi-hardwood growth. Take 4- to 6-inch pieces and plant in a well-drained growth medium. Using a rooting hormone can help speed rooting. Keep lightly watered for four to six weeks until they become rooted.

## Cultivars

The most common species grown in Florida is *Ixora coccinea*, which produces a yellowish-orange flower, but many species and cultivars should be available at your local nurseries. Popular *Ixora* varieties include:

- *Ixora* X 'Nora Grant' - red flowers
- *Ixora casei* 'Super King' - large red flowers
- *Ixora* X 'Angela Busman' - rose flowers
- *Ixora* X 'Maui' - orange flowers
- *Ixora* X 'Prince of Orange' - orange flowers
- *Ixora chinensis* 'Fraseri' - orange-rose flowers
- *Ixora chinensis* 'Singapore Yellow' - yellow flowers

- *Ixora X 'Frances Perry'* - yellow flowers
- *Ixora X 'Herrera's White'* - white flowers

Dwarf cultivars are also available in orange, pink, red, and yellow.

If you have good luck with *Ixora* you may also want to try growing pentas and *Rondeletia*, which are also members of the same plant family (*Rubiaceae*) and perform well throughout south Florida. Other members of this family of plants include:

coffee - *Coffea arabica*

gardenia - *Gardenia species*

Mexican fire bush - *Hamelia patens*

firecracker vine - *Manettia rubra*

false poinsettia - *Mussaenda species*

wild coffee - *Psychotria species*

panama rose - *Rondeletia splendens*

bush pentas - *Rondeletia leucophylla*