Tabebuia caraiba: Trumpet Tree

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Introduction
An ideal patio, specimen, or lawn tree, the Tabebuias are small, 15- to 25-foot tall, evergreen trees with silvery foliage and deeply furrowed, silvery bark on picturesque, contorted branches and trunk. The crown is usually asymmetrical with two or three major trunks or branches dominating the crown. During late winter and sporadically throughout the year, they put on a brilliant display composed of a multitude of two to three-inch-long, golden yellow, trumpet-shaped blooms borne in terminal flower clusters. The leaves often drop just before the flowers appear.

General Information
Scientific name: Tabebuia caraiba
Pronunciation: tab-eh-BOO-yuh kuh-RYE-buh
Common name(s): Trumpet tree
Family: Bignoniaceae
USDA hardiness zones: 10A through 11 (Fig. 2)
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: little invasive potential
Uses: street without sidewalk; deck or patio; specimen; parking lot island < 100 sq ft; parking lot island 100-200 sq ft; parking lot island > 200 sq ft; tree lawn 3-4 feet wide; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median; container or planter
Availability: not native to North America

Figure 1. Mature Tabebuia caraiba: trumpet tree
Credits: Ed Gilman, UF/IFAS

Figure 2. Range
**Description**

Height: 15 to 25 feet  
Spread: 10 to 15 feet  
Crown uniformity: irregular  
Crown shape: oval  
Crown density: dense  
Growth rate: moderate  
Texture: medium

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite (Fig. 3)  
Leaf type: palmately compound  
Leaf margin: entire, undulate  
Leaf shape: oblong, elliptic (oval)  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen  
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches  
Leaf color: silver  
Fall color: no color change  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**

Flower color: yellow  
Flower characteristics: very showy

**Fruit**

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like, elongated  
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches, 6 to 12 inches  
Fruit covering: dry or hard  
Fruit color: brown  
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; not showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

**Trunk and Branches**

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; showy; typically one trunk; thorns  
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure  
Breakage: susceptible to breakage

**Current year twig color:** brown  
**Current year twig thickness:** medium  
**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

**Culture**

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun, or partial shade  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; alkaline; well-drained  
Drought tolerance: high  
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

**Other**

Roots: not a problem  
Winter interest: yes  
Outstanding tree: yes  
Ozone sensitivity: unknown  
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: unknown  
Pest resistance: free of serious pests and diseases

**Use and Management**

A native of tropical America, trumpet tree can be grown in full sun or partial shade on any reasonably fertile soil with moderate moisture. Trees should be protected from frost. Although some will leaf out following a freeze, the tree is often weakened and grows poorly. The wood becomes brittle with age and can break easily in strong winds but this is not usually a problem since trees are small with an open canopy and should not be cause to eliminate this beautiful tree from your tree palette. To the contrary, it is one of the most beautiful trees in flower which has a place in most landscapes.

The pink trumpet tree (*Tabebuia heterophylla*) is the one most suited for street tree planting since it is reportedly more sturdy and durable than *Tabebuia caraiba*. *Tabebuia impetigenosa* and *Tabebuia umbellata* are hardy to zone 9b with pink flowers borne on bare branches.

Propagation is by seed or layering.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.