

Justicia carnea, Jacobinia, Flamingo Plant¹

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Introduction

Jacobinia is an upright, evergreen shrub, 3 to 7 feet tall and wide, with large, 6-inch-long, dark green leaves and upwardly facing plumes of tubular, slightly fragrant flower clusters in rose-purple, red, yellow, orange, apricot, or white (depending on the selection), which appear from early summer until fall (Fig. 1). The plant cycles through 2 to 4 major flowering periods during the year, with few flowers in between. Many stems appear from the center of the plant and rise straight up for several feet before branching. The rapid growth and evergreen nature make jacobinia ideal for use as a foundation or mass planting. It may be used in various containers, or it may even be trained into an attractive espalier. Use it in front of a green shrubbery border to create a color accent throughout the warm months.



Figure 1. Jacobinia

General Information

Scientific name: *Justicia carnea*

Pronunciation: juss-TISH-ee-uh KAR-nee-uh

Common name(s): jacobinia, flamingo plant

Family: *Acanthaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; cut flowers

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



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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Description

Height: 3 to 6 feet
Spread: 2 to 3 feet
Plant habit: upright; spreading
Plant density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: opposite/subopposite
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: undulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white; pink; apricot; yellow; lavender
Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the year

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod or pod-like
Fruit length: less than .5 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: green
Current year stem/twig thickness: very thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in the shade
Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: unknown
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
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: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Rain and irrigation weigh the foliage down and cause the branches to spread out, sometimes touching the ground. This limits height growth and opens up the plant to allow light to enter the interior, stimulating growth from the lower stem and inner branches. It has a place in almost every garden in USDA hardiness zones 8b through 11.

Jacobinia should be grown on rich, well-drained soil that receives ample moisture in a location shaded from full-day sun. Although tender to frost, plants will grow back quickly in springtime in USDA hardiness zones 8 and 9. The only necessary pruning during the growing season should be limited to removal of dead flower heads or occasional pinching to stimulate branching. Since flowers form on new growth, prune early in the spring so flower display is not reduced. This increases the number of branches and flowers and creates an attractive, full plant. Older plants benefit from rejuvenation type pruning where most of the taller stems are cut back to a node close to the ground. If this is performed each year, plants should last for many years.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Plant and Diseases

Nematodes and spider mites. Caterpillars occasionally chew portions of the foliage, but these will not kill the plant.

No pests or diseases are of major concern.