

# *Dombeya* spp. Tropical Snowball<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

A native of the tropical parts of Africa, tropical snowball is grown more for its flower display than anything else (Figure 1). The coarse-textured foliage is simple with shallow or deep palmate lobes. Bright pink or red flowers are prominently displayed on the new growth in the summer and sporadically throughout the year. Some types have white flowers.

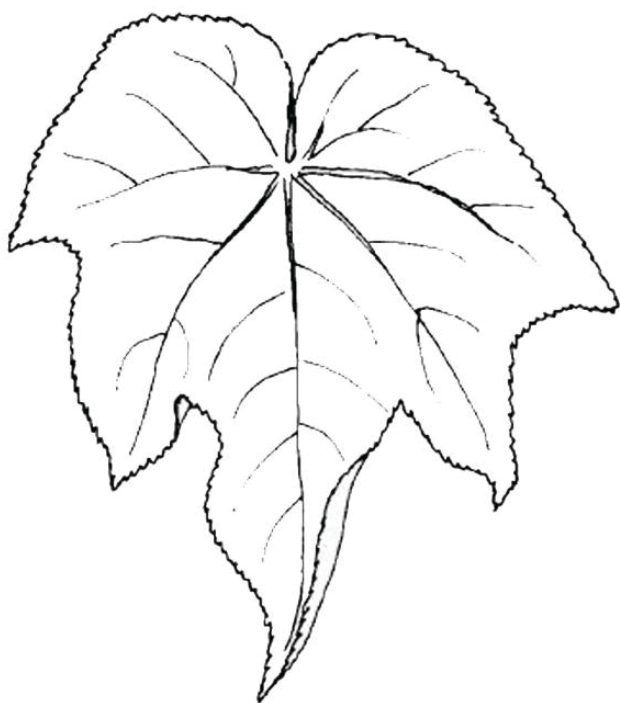


Figure 1. Tropical snowball.  
Credits: UF/IFAS

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Dombeya* spp.

**Pronunciation:** dom-BEE-yuh species

**Common name(s):** tropical snowball

**Family:** *Byttneriaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9 through 11 (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

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**Uses:** trained as a standard; accent; cut flowers; screen; foundation; border

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

## Description

**Height:** 6 to 10 feet

**Spread:** 6 to 8 feet

**Plant habit:** oval

**Plant density:** dense

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** lobed

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** palmate

**Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 8 to 12 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** red; pink

**Flower characteristic:** summer flowering; fall flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** unknown

**Fruit length:** unknown

**Fruit cover:** unknown

**Fruit color:** unknown

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

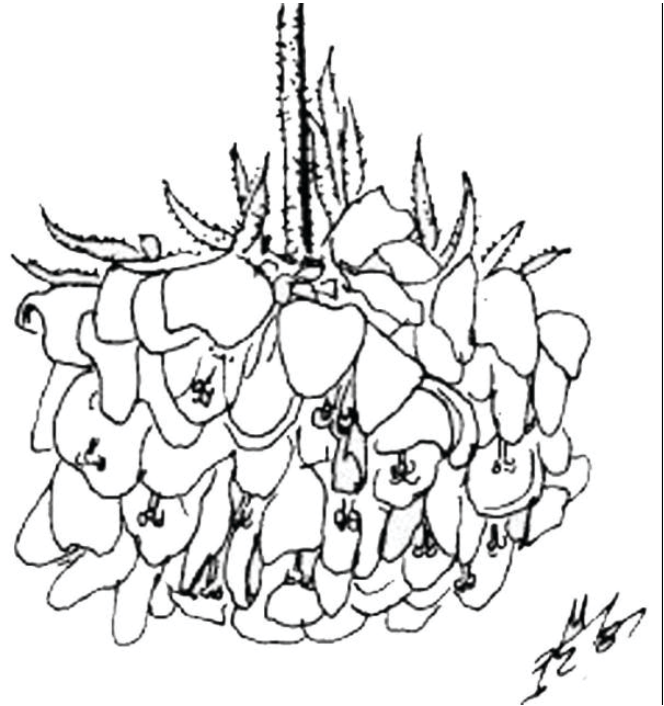


Figure 3. Flower of tropical snowball.

Credits: UF/IFAS

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; not particularly showy

**Current year stem/twig color:** green

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** medium

## Culture

**Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; alkaline; sand; loam; clay

**Soil salt tolerances:** poor

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 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:** very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

## Use and Management

Snowball is most often used as a specimen in a shrub border or near the corner of a building. Its beautiful flowers make this a premium shrub for locating in any part of a sunny landscape. Flower number is reduced in partial shaded locations.

Tropical snowball grows fast and adapts to a wide variety of soils. Several fertilizer applications each year help keep leaves dark green all year long. Some micronutrient deficiency symptoms appear in soils with a pH above 8.0. Regular applications with appropriate fertilizers prevent symptoms from appearing.

## Pests and Diseases

Aphids and scales often infest the foliage and stems. Sooty mold often follows. Soil borne nematodes can stress the plant by reducing the size of the root system.