

***Heliconia rostrata* Lobster Claw¹**

Edward F. Gilman, Alan Meerow, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen²

Introduction

Lobster claw is an herbaceous perennial with leathery, dark green leaves which are borne on long petioles arising directly from the ground. It has 3 to 5 feet tall stems terminated by a drooping inflorescence. The flowers hang in showy clusters that emerge from second year stalks. They are enclosed by scarlet- and yellow-colored bracts that are 6 to 8 inches long. This unique plant is used as a specimen for tropical gardens. The inflorescence may be cut for indoor decoration where they last for several weeks.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Heliconia rostrata*: Lobster Claw
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Flower - *Heliconia rostrata*: Lobster Claw
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Heliconia rostrata*

Pronunciation: hel-lick-KOE-nee-uh ros-STRAY-tuh

Common name(s): lobster claw, false bird of paradise

Family: *Heliconiaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

1. This document is FPS248, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; and Alan Meerow, former associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Ft. Lauderdale Research and Education Center, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: cut flowers; suitable for growing indoors

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



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 5 to 6 feet

Spread: 3 to 6 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristic: spring flowering; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: unknown

Fruit color: blue

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: green

Current year stem/twig thickness: thick

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

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

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: moderate

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

Lobster claw will prosper in locations that receive full or partial sun. It grows and flowers best in fertile, moist soil. Fertilize this plant regularly during the growing season.

Propagation is by division of the matted clumps.

Pests and Diseases

None are usually serious. This plant may be bothered by *Cercospora* and *Helminthosporium* leaf spots. Scales and nematodes may also cause problems.