

Justicia carnea Jacobinia, Flamingo Plant, Brazilian-plume¹

Edward F. Gilman²

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. 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. Full Form—*Justicia carnea*: Jacobinia, flamingo plant, Brazilian-plume.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Leaf—*Justicia carnea*: Jacobinia, flamingo plant, Brazilian-plume.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 3. Flower—*Justicia carnea*: Jacobinia, flamingo plant, Brazilian-plume.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

1. This document is FPS-308, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised October 2023. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, Department of Environmental Horticulture; 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.

General Information

Scientific name: *Justicia carnea*

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

Common name(s): jacobinia, flamingo plant, Brazilian-plume

Family: *Acanthaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8B through 11 (Figure 4)

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

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

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 4. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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 0.5 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

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.

Pest 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.